Interview with Ambassador Michael Ussery

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR MICHAEL USSERY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview was not been edited by Ambassador Ussery]

Q: Today is October the 6th, 1998. This is an interview with Michael Ussery. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, all right, let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

USSERY: Okay, good. I was born and raised in Columbia, South Carolina, born there and spent my first 18 years there, and lived in about three homes, all within about two miles of each other at the most, so I didn't venture very far.

Q: Incidentally, my grandfather burned down your place. He was an officer with Sherman.

USSERY: I remember well growing up the centennial anniversary of the Civil War, and you know focusing a lot on that and going around to some of the houses that Sherman spared that still stand. But my parents both came from a small town of about two thousand people in South Carolina. Both went to the University of South Carolina. Very few others were leaving the farm to go to the university. My father's brother didn't go, and my mother's five brothers, none of them went to the university. And so they were childhood sweethearts,

and he was in the navy in World War II. His claim to fame was he was a pilot trainer and he once put a training plane in the Potomac River up here. He joined the navy from his one year at George Washington University graduate school. When the war broke out, and after the plunge in the river, he became a navy navigator, taught math at the University of Georgia after the war, and settled back into Columbia, South Carolina, where I was born.

Q: What was he doing in Columbia?

USSERY: He was in the insurance business, and speaking of the Civil War, after three years with the Travelers Company, about the time I was born, he went to Lincoln National Life Insurance Company in Indiana and said he'd like to open up their South Carolina operation for them. They had nothing below the Mason-Dixon Line. They told him they were very doubtful about doing this enterprise because with the name Lincoln it's hard to imagine people buying life insurance. He convinced them to give him a try, and he basically spent the rest of his life running South Carolina for Lincoln Life.

Q: How about your mother?

USSERY: My mother stayed at home and took care of my sister and me until the time I was going to college. The part that really helped provide for my college costs, they opened a gift shop in a new Sheraton Hotel in Columbia, South Carolina. I'd work there when I would go home on weekends or during the summer. And they ran that for a few years. After my father had a couple of heart attacks and was sick, my mother went back to work for the first time in whatever that would have been, 30 years or something, and worked until she retired a few years ago. She worked for about 20 years for an orthopedic medical practice as their administrator.

Q: Growing up in Columbia, could you talk a little bit about the schools, first the elementary schools? What sort of schools did you go to?

USSERY: I feel like I actually benefited from great schools, and in fact, when I went to high school, it was one of the newer, most modern high schools in the state. It was only about three years old when I entered. In fact, it was the second largest high school in the state, but it was downsized for being too big. I was in a class of 465 graduating students, but the school had all the amenities. I have great recollections of my high school and what we called then junior high school years. I had little league baseball and other things. I'm sure when you grew up too, Stu, we didn't have all the team sports and all the activities that kids have now, but I had a very, very happy childhood. It seemed to be carefree and sports oriented. I think one of the landmarks, though, was when I was in the 10th grade. It was a big year for integration in the schools in Columbia, South Carolina. We had about 75 black students out of a student population of 1,500, grades 10 through 12, bused in that year. I remember a little of the tumultuousness of the problems of segregation and the move to integration when I was younger, and people's great fears about what was going to happen. And I actually went through it and had a very beneficial experience, as somebody who was an athlete and getting to finally be in a school — hard to imagine these — having been in an almost all-white school for so much of my childhood. It seems unthinkable now.

Q: In the elementary, junior high, high, what sort of books did you like to read?

USSERY: I think maybe I was a little bit of an interested student in the sense that I loved to read. I would read history books, I would read books about sports figures. I read a lot of history, and I remember reading now a book in the fifth grade that really stayed with me about Andrew Jackson and his life and his childhood and his presidency. I did read a lot about the Civil War. I remember reading a book about the Naval Academy and in the fifth grade declaring that someday I wanted to go to the Naval Academy. This actually led my parents — who always just provided every opportunity for me and everything — to take me that next year up to Annapolis and let me see it, at the age of 11 or 12. When I was 12, speaking of opportunities, our family spent a month to five weeks driving across America and back, which really kind of opened my eyes for the first time and was terrific.

I was a very good elementary student, but I was actually a horrific junior high and high school student. I graduated in the bottom fourth of my high school class. I got in a little bit of trouble, but not much trouble — I really wasn't doing, in today's term, inappropriate things so much — but I was not studying. I was spending my afternoons till after dark playing sports, not doing all the homework I should have been doing, never being prepared for tests. And sometimes it's a wonder that I survived the high school system. In my senior year in high school, I think I had a B, three C's, and a D mid-year of my senior year, just enough that if I had had one grade lower, of course, I would have been kicked off the high school basketball team. And at that point in time I was turned down by a couple of colleges that I wanted to get into, and I woke up and said, “My God, maybe I'm going to be in Vietnam next year or working in the local garage.” I had good SAT scores but bad grades, so I spent the last semester, for the first time in my life, studying and ended up with four B's and a C four months later, and learned a little bit about applying myself — though I will say parenthetically then I went on to be a good college student.

Q: Well, while you're there, when you couldn't avoid ignoring your schoolwork, what courses turned you on more than others?

USSERY: Well, it's easier to say the ones that turned me off, including math and biology . . . and French. If I'd known I was going to be an ambassador to Morocco some day, I would have studied French harder back in the ninth grade. But no, I really always enjoyed history and English, and those were far and away my favorite subjects.

Q: You got out of high school when? You graduated when?

USSERY: 1969.

Q: That's a good year for the military and all that.

USSERY: That's right.

Q: What happened?

USSERY: Well, I was deferred upon proof of graduation and those final grades being brought up to Newberry College, which was 45 miles away from Columbia, South Carolina, in a town called Newberry. It was a small liberal arts school, eight hundred and something students, and 15 percent of the student body was on some form of athletic scholarship. It was a little jock institution. One of its claims to fame was it was the smallest school in America with a football team. And so I walked off to Newberry in the fall of 1969.

Q: You were there from '69 to —

USSERY: — to '73, a '73 grad, 25 years ago, and next week's the 25th reunion of that class.

Q: What were you majoring in then?

USSERY: I went there thinking that I wanted to be a business major. In many ways I was very close to my father, and one of the few great arguments we ever had was when I came home at the end of the first semester and told him I didn't want to major in business any more. I was thinking about majoring in history or political science, to which he said, “What the hell can you do with a degree in history or political science?” And I told him, well, I didn't really enjoy the accounting course that I had taken, and I had a real personal interest in history and political science, and so I don't remember if he really accepted the decision or I just proceeded to enroll in the courses I wanted, but that's the path I took.

Q: Did you find yourself concentrating in any particular area of history or political science?

USSERY: Well, I really was very interested both in comparative systems — the US, the UK, and other systems — very interested, principally interested in current politics at all times, and interested in early American history and ancient civilizations.

Q: I would think there would be a problem in growing up in Columbia, South Carolina, in that area, in keeping up with events in the world. I don't know the newspapers there, but even in the high school but also in college, how were you keeping up with the world outside?

USSERY: Well, I think probably because of my parents — my parents were very active supporters in politics. In the early 1960's, South Carolina was for all intents and purposes a one-party state, Democratic, and they were very active in trying to build the Republican Party. I think I was heavily influenced by my exposure to politics through them. When I was 13 years old, I went to Barry Goldwater's last rally of the 1964 campaign, which was in Columbia, South Carolina, before he then went on to finish the campaign in California. And even though we all know that he was totally slaughtered in that campaign, I remember taking down this canvas Goldwater-Miller banner, which I still have today, and I remember that rally. I remember my father took me to the debates, I think probably — I'm going to guess — 1962, between Senator Johnston, who was being challenged by then Governor Fritz Hollings. Hollings, now 36 years later, is running for reelection for US Senate. I remember going to debates and a lot of political events like that. I don't think I followed international events closely through high school. I remember when there was the Seven Days' War, I was off on some school trip. I hadn't even read. And when I came back, there had been some war in the Mideast, didn't pay any attention to it.

Q: That was '67.

USSERY: So other than just generally being somebody who just on my own watched the evening news at night, that was really my exposure to the outside world.

Q: What about at your college? Did they have any particular set other than having sports and business?

USSERY: I really do think it was at that time a really fine liberal arts school. One of the formative things for me was that the year before I arrived, they hired a lot of new young professors, people in their late 20's and early 30's, fresh out of universities with their degrees in English, history, and philosophy. I had some professors who really made academiceducation — interesting for me. I loved my philosophy professor. That guy was just remarkable. He had a big influence on me. And my junior year, nine of these professors were denied tenure, and were basically being fired, and this was because — a lot of people felt — they were the young liberal Turks, and this South Carolina institution had decided it had made a mistake bringing all this new blood in. And of course at the time, you know, it was the late '60's, early '70's, and a very different time culturally in America, a lot of sharp divisions. So I was one of the five students that really led a large student protest against these teachers' being fired. I wrote probably two-thirds of the school newspaper special issue about this, did most of the background. Normally, I was at that time the sports editor only, but I was brought into this. And I helped lead a rally on the campus, a meeting with the president of the college. In the end, we saved three of the nine professors. One of them is still there today, who I stay in close touch with, Dr. Curley, and I think really we set in motion the firing of that president a few months later. And that was really important to me.

I think as a small southern college, we were really behind in terms of our expressions about the Vietnam War. Well, a lot of other students my age all across America were out protesting about the Vietnam War. We didn't want to go to Vietnam, but we weren't a campus that was a hotbed of anti-Vietnam activity. So for me, this was the first thing that really threw me into real greater involvement and, I think, furthered my interest both in politics and general community activity.

Q: How was segregation going at your college? Was that —

USSERY: Actually, that's a good question. When I went to college, integration had really only intensified and been pretty full-force in effect in South Carolina probably three years.

The integration of the college was hardly noted with any passing. By the time I was there, nobody thought about the fact that there were black and white students together, albeit that the black population — I'm going to guess — was probably 10 percent of the college, in part because the cost was relatively high compared to public education. A large preponderance of the black students were going to the University of South Carolina or the other public schools, and nobody thought twice about it, and there were no problems. I actually probably had more black friends in high school than I did in college. I also knew probably almost everybody by name on my little college campus, but I can hardly say I have a memory about the fact that the college was integrated. That was the way it was then.

Q: When you graduated in '1973 —

USSERY: Correct.

Q: — had you been pointing yourself towards anything?

USSERY: No. I had become a good student in college, and I enjoyed being involved, was selected the — what was it called? It was something in my fraternity — the member of the year? I don't think we called it the most valuable player . . . but whatever. I had been an officer in the fraternity, been on the judicial board at school, been the sports editor, was active on campus — but I generally think that my being a good student was not directed towards a specific purpose or a career idea. And when I got into my senior year, then I started thinking, “Well, what do I want to do?” And I also had French that year, again, after having been a terrible student. I think it was a prerequisite to have a language, so I went back to French. We had an exchange student from France, a woman who was 26 years old, who was my “professor”. That was my junior year. And so I spent the year dating my French professor, which while for a lot of people that would have been the catalyst for becoming a good French student, for me I reverted to my old ways and said, well,

I'm dating the French professor; I don't have to study so hard; she'll never give me bad grades. And I came out as a perfectly mediocre C student.

But my senior year I started thinking what did I want to do? And I remember being preoccupied with two thoughts. One was: Well, whatever I do, I'd like to go out and do something and by the time I'm 30 go live overseas, probably in France and live an unconventional life. I felt like after all I'd done working to contribute to my college education — and I got a small scholarship while I was in school, got some grant money, and I worked at the college — and my parents had worked so hard — it was a struggle for them with my Dad's bad health to put me through this private school — I couldn't just go off and run a way and be a bum or, in the term of the day, a hippie after college. I had to go work. But I had it in my mind, if I work till I'm 30, and then when I'm 30 I'll go live the good life in France and will have proved I'm not worthless.

The other thought was: I felt mortified at the idea of going our and either just being in the insurance business with my father, which didn't sound interesting to me — I'd been up close to it; it sounded terribly boring, and I didn't see myself as a salesman — or just to sit at a desk all day. Now somebody who loved to move around all day, running, walking from events to events, being in activities and moving and all that, and to me, work somehow, if you didn't do physical labor, work suggested you just sat at a desk and were bored to tears all day — and I dreaded that. The threat of going to Vietnam had greatly diminished. We had the lottery system. I had a high enough lottery number that I knew I wasn't probably going to Vietnam.

One other argument I had with my father was my sophomore year. He did want me to drop out of school for a semester, because he could politically get me into the National Guard, which 20-something years later we find out through Vice-President Quayle was a very controversial thing to do. But I refused to drop out. I told my father I didn't want to drop out of my school. I liked it, I was very involved in the school and I'd rather stay in and take my chances. So anyway, my senior year I took the GRE, the graduate exam, and I

took the law school exams, as a sign of somebody who was truly hopelessly lost about what he wanted to do. I did well enough in the law school exams that I could have gone to the University of South Carolina law school, and that started forcing me into a decision. I realized that I was only thinking about going to law school because of my interest in politics. At that time, most members of the General Assembly of South Carolina were lawyers. That was the natural path to get into politics. Then I really thought about it and realized I really didn't want to be doing a bunch of divorces and lawsuits just to get into politics, and so I stumbled on the idea of going to city planning school. I applied to two that I was hearing very good things about, one at Texas A & M and the other at Georgia State University. I also looked a little bit at criminal law school. Texas A & M offered me a scholarship, and I hadn't even heard of being accepted by Georgia State. I was coming up on the August date to reply to Texas A & M, and I was about to go off to Texas A & M without ever having seen the place, no idea that it was way out in the boonies of nowhere in Texas — Twin Cities or something, or Twin Towns in Texas — when I was accepted to Georgia State. I always think how different life might have been if I had run off to Texas, but I went to Atlanta to go to graduate school in city planning.

Q: Had there been anything outside of just the name of city planning?

USSERY: I was really attracted to the idea that we were going to build great new cities, and I was really thinking more along the lines of what really might have been closer to being an architectural school. And when I got to the graduate school, actually, I was very unhappy to find myself mired down trying to learn about fixing transportation problems and sewer and water problems and things like that that were terribly mundane to me.

Q: You were at the University of Georgia. This would be '73 you went there?

USSERY: Georgia State, in Atlanta.

Q: Georgia State.

USSERY: Yes.

Q: And how long were you at Georgia State?

USSERY: Well, I was at Georgia State for two years, but I actually was for a while only taking one class a semester, just enough to stay in. I knew I had to work to make ends meet, and I went in to see my counselor, and he said, “Well, let me look for you.” And I went out. I had been working at hotels in summers. I'd also worked high-rise construction one summer, which was quite a death-defying experience building a 22-story building in South Carolina, which at that time was the highest in Columbia. But I was working at hotels, where my parents' gift shop was, and another hotel based on that experience. So I went down to the Holiday Inn, and they hired me to be the night clerk and do the books and stuff. I did that for one day and said, “Well, that's it, I'm not working here any more.” The next day the counselor called me and said, “The legislature of Georgia has asked us to help find two students who can be part-time research assistants in the Georgia Legislature. And you've got your political science background; I'll be glad to recommend you.” And I said, “Well, thank you, but I'm just over here from South Carolina; I'm sure they're not going to hire somebody who doesn't know Georgia.” He said, “No, I don't think that'll be the issue. Let's see.”

I was hired, and after about six months of doing that, the chairman of the committee ran for US Congress, and I became the first person on his campaign staff and did that for nine months. He won an upset election in the Watergate year, '74, was one of the new Democrats elected, beat an eight-year incumbent republican, and on Election Day all the polls said we were going to lose. So that was a very nice experience to go through.

Then I went back to taking graduate courses at night while I worked full-time at the Georgia General Assembly during the day. I was working for this Democrat congressman, Elliott Levitas. I had been working on his campaign, and he'd been elected. I told him the one thing I was interested in was going to Washington. I said, “My father went to

Washington after college. I love politics. I'd love it if you'd get elected to go to Washington." He said, "I hear you." My first bad experience with a politician, even though he was a brilliant man, a very progressive man, a Rhodes Scholar (who knows what to say about Rhodes Scholars while we talk about our President possibly being impeached today?). After the campaign he asked me to work for him in his Atlanta office, and I said, "No thanks, I don't want to your caseworker in Atlanta. I want to be in the legislative process in Washington." He said, "Well, try this for a couple of years and do it." So I refused and went back to the legislature, found a job, and was full-time while going to school, and during that time I decided I wasn't going to finish my degree, I wasn't interested in it, but I was going to continue to pursue politics.

My father had a heart attack in '75, and at that point I decided, well, time to move back home to South Carolina and be close to the family. So I did.

Q: Did city planning ever come up again, or was this —

USSERY: Well, only this week. I'm actually living in Fauquier County, a lovely rural county 40 miles down the road from where we are today, and it's been great. Yesterday I was meeting with a candidate who's running for supervisor who's asking me for my help, and I found myself talking more about land use and zoning issues than I'd talked about in 25 years.

Q: Where do you live in Fauquier County?

USSERY: Warrenton.

Q: My daughter's husband has some property in Upperville.

USSERY: Okay. Well, you know it's a nice county out there. It's a great place.

Q: When you came back to Columbia, you'd had this political experience and all. Were you able to translate that into anything?

USSERY: Yes. I remember my father was not a powerful person. He was a delightful person, got along with everybody. He had a good network, we'd call it today. He couldn't just order things to happen, but he had a terrific network, and out of this network virtually every summer job I had until my junior year in college my father just found for me. I was going to be a Pepsi route driver one year, work at the hotel as a life guard — different things like this. And I went home my junior year and said, “Well, Dad, what am I going to do this summer?” He said, “I don't know. I guess you're going to go find a job.” And that's when the only thing I could find was high-rise construction, so I learned that if I wanted to find something to start looking a little bit in advance.

But when I got back to Columbia in 1975, it was my parents' connections — things being a little bit political — that got me a job working in the state planning office for the Governor of South Carolina. Well, it was John West. He was a Democrat, but the office —

Q: Later ambassador to Saudi Arabia, wasn't he?

USSERY: Later ambassador to Saudi Arabia. The planning office was really controlled by some buddies of my father who were Republicans. They were career people, but they were Republicans. They hired me. After a year with that experience, and having worked in the Georgia General Assembly, one of my parents' best friends, who was my orthopedic surgeon (fixed my broken arm as a child), was the president of the South Carolina Medical Association. He needed somebody to head up public affairs and lobbying for him, to work on this new issue called malpractice insurance in the mid-1970's, and I got that job. So really, all the way through the mid-1970's in many, many ways what I was able to do, beyond what was directly funded by my parents, was their network that helped me get my start.

Q: What was your impression of the legislative political situation in Georgia at the time? I was wondering what your impression was of the Georgia Legislature.

USSERY: It was wild. They had a very controversial character named Lester Maddox, who'd been governor and was then lieutenant governor. They had a progressive governor. They had — I said some of the stupidest people I've met in my life were in the Georgia General Assembly, some good ole boys from all different parts there. One of the most fascinating debates I ever saw was the equal rights amendment vote in the Georgia legislature.

Q: That would deal with having women have —

USSERY: — full equal rights, whatever. But I saw Georgia legislators talk about the implications for toilet seats in rest rooms and unisex and, Oh my God, I can't remember, but it was a mind-numbing and boggling experience. I had the good fortune while I was over there of being invited on about an hour's notice to go see an Atlanta Braves baseball game when Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth's record for 715 home runs and the next week I got to see Hank and get his autograph when he came in to be honored at the Georgia General Assembly. But it was really a fun experience, as you really had everything, between the sophistication of some legislators from Atlanta and the guys from the sticks out there, all come together. It was quite an experience. In fact, it was more rough and tumble and more wild and out of control by far than the South Carolina legislature.

Q: Well, did you find the South Carolina political situation was more under control, under the old guard, or not?

USSERY: Well, Georgia more of old guard still in control. South Carolina, the Republicans were starting to make inroads, but it was just easier to figure out who was on first in South Carolina, and things just seemed to be — maybe for lack of a better term — more civilized in South Carolina. And so I wasn't as intrigued with South Carolina, but I had a big

task to try to get several malpractice and pharmaceutical bills through, and I'd try to stop legislation to expand the authority and the role of chiropractors, things like that. So it was a very interesting two years.

Q: What was your impression of medical politics?

USSERY: Well, that's a very good question because it's very different from today. In the 1970's we were just starting to see the erosion of doctors on this grand pedestal, but still, for all intents and purposes, doctors had a very prominent premier position in society, and they were viewed as people without problems, brilliant people who were great leaders in society and the community. And I think at that time that was a big difference in getting through the reforms we did in South Carolina, because they were so well respected. Now today it's quite a different situation, but I went back and I realized that the fears the South Carolina physicians had at that time, of how high insurance rates could go — my gosh, anybody would love to have those kind of rates these days. They're probably ten times higher, even with reforms.

Q: How were the lines drawn?

USSERY: Well, it was really trial lawyers against doctors. Trial lawyers were generally a prominent country club, golf, and hunting set, but they also still had a little bit of a — not seedy image, but — slick image that contrasted very nicely for us against physicians at that time.

Q: Did the AMA play a role at that time?

USSERY: It was all very much part of a national effort, battled state by state, tied into the national AMA and the whole movement across the country, starting in California when insurance premiums jumped astronomically out there, and malpractice cases really rose up dramatically.

Q: Well, you did this for a couple of years. What, are we moving towards 1978?

USSERY: That's right. I met two important people in my. One was my first wife, who was my next-door neighbor, and we dated and lived together for a couple of years and got married in 1978, and the other was a state senator named Carroll Campbell. And just as I'd met Elliott Levitas and he was the most impressive state legislator I had met in Georgia and went to work in his campaign, Campbell was the most impressive state legislator I'd met in South Carolina. In 1978 he asked me to come to work in his campaign, through my high-school friend and college roommate whose name was Lee Atwater. He was working in Thurmond's campaign. He and Campbell had been close. Campbell always thought Atwater would be in his campaign. When Thurmond took him away, he tried to fill in, and he asked me to go fill in for him up there and work for Campbell, so I did. So that overnight turned me from a Democrat into a Republican, and so I worked in the '78 Campbell campaign.

Q: What were the issues that you found yourself wrestling with in the '78 campaign?

USSERY: Well, in 1978, it was a good year to be a Republican, midterm of the Carter period. I'd been a Carter supporter in 1976. I began to believe I was wrong, though some of my best friends were working for Carter in the White House, including my old roommate, Bob Avely from Atlanta. In fact, I'd been offered a job in the Carter campaign in 1975, but that was the time I'd already made the decision that I needed to get back to Columbia and didn't know whether I was passing up a big opportunity or not. But in '78 we were starting to have tax issues, and in 1978 the centerpiece of our campaign was this congressman from Buffalo, New York, Jack Kemp's new idea for a 33 percent tax cut. So we ran that. But the other was, we were running against a Horatio Alger story. We were running against a man named Max Heller, who was the mayor of Greenville, South Carolina. He was a Jew who had come over from Austria at the age of 13 and escaped the Nazis. As a boy, really, he was sweeping floors in textile factories, and became a rags-to-riches story. And he was running against this 30-something-year-old politician,

Carroll Campbell, who also grew up poor, dropped out of the University of South Carolina, couldn't afford to even maintain going to public school. His brother died in Vietnam. So it was an interesting contrast. Campbell was always tarred with the view that there was an anti-Semite undertone to the campaign or that Campbell supporters were anti-Semites and that that helped swing the difference. It really wasn't true, but it was an image that haunted Campbell all the time he was one of the final four candidates for Vice-President consideration for Bob Dole two years ago. One of the things Campbell used to point to was that in putting people on his staff he had me, and I'd been the first guy on the campaign of Elliott Levitas, who was the first Jew elected to Congress from the Deep South. But those were the issues.

The issue about anti-Semitic or not didn't actually happen in the campaign, but it came up with people analyzing the campaign afterwards. There was an independent candidate who got less than two percent of the vote, a real blue-collar guy who owned a tow-truck business. And we always felt like his two percent was taken away from Carroll Campbell, because anybody this guy had was a conservative who would have voted for Campbell otherwise. We thought that was really probably going to cost us the election, and with some irony, I went into two election nights, '74 and '78, where the predictions were my candidate was going to lose and he ended up winning.

Well, anyway, this tow-truck operator made remarks two days before the election that only a Christian should be elected to Congress, and so that's where that issue blew up. For years, conspiracy theorists always believed that Campbell had had the guy put in to the race and programmed the guy to make this remark with the intention being to help Campbell. Of course, at the time it happened, for those of us on the inside, this deplorable act actually meant it was going to create a backlash against us, that people were going to go vote for Heller because this terrible attack had been made. That was the 1978 campaign in a nutshell.

Q: Did race raise itself at all in that time?

USSERY: No, race did not. Campbell's got a great record of cooperation with a good relationship and a good amount of support, for a Republican, inside the black community. He had been, ten years before that, publicly against busing, but that has never lingered as a problem between him and the black community. No, we'd really missed the height of the race issues, even though in the mid-'60's in South Carolina, Senator Thurmond and Floyd Spence, they all left the Democrat Party over issues of race and became Republicans. By the time we were at it, it seemed to be kind of ancient history.

Q: What was the role of Senator Strom Thurmond during that period?

USSERY: We always felt that Thurmond's popularity on the ticket would help us. Thurmond was running against a candidate who became probably one of the most popular people never elected in South Carolina, by the name of Pug Ravenel. In, I believe, 1974, he won this big upset nomination. And then the courts threw him off the ticket because he hadn't met the residency requirement coming back from New York. He had a huge following, and probably could have been elected to anything else in the state at that time except running against Thurmond. And now again, we're talking 20 years later, Thurmond's still in office, but at that time the view was Thurmond was getting too old for his job and times were right for a change, and so Ravenel ran.

Q: At that period, what was the attraction of Strom Thurmond?

USSERY: South Carolina is a conservative state. That's still true today. And he'd been a leader of the conservative movement at that time. He'd done a fantastic job and was legendary for his constituent service. He'd become famous nationally for having gained more electoral votes in 1948 than any other independent candidate ever has in history. He'd been the governor of the state. So of course he certainly did have the following of those who were racists, but it would be a terrible injustice to Thurmond to suggest that that's the real foundation or the main foundation for his popularity, even back in 1978. He was very much in tune with most of the voters at that time, and even though he's much

more conservative than I am today, I have to give him his credit. And he did benefit, in reality, in 1978, from running against someone who was really liberal to moderate, which is about as far left as anybody had ever been on a ticket in South Carolina. So that helped him.

Q: In your congressional campaign that you were working on, was it sort of running against Carter?

USSERY: Absolutely, that's a good point. I mean, I used to say the easiest campaign I ever worked on was that one, because every day we just got up and attacked Carter on something different.

Q: Well, what did you — speaking collectively — see as the problem with Carter at that point, in '78?

USSERY: You know, maybe I've lived so long I don't remember it as vividly as I'd like, but Carter seemed to come across almost daily as not a strong leader. And the economy was just doing so horribly that even though he may have had some good policies that the country needed, on the big stuff . . . on foreign policy he seemed to be lost or weak — it was easy to characterize him as weak — and the economy, the numbers spoke for themselves, so it undercut everything he tried to do.

Q: Then the election took place. Your man was elected, Carroll Campbell, was it?

USSERY: Carroll Campbell.

Q: And what happened?

USSERY: So Campbell asked me if I wanted to go to Washington and be his press secretary. I'd handled the press in the campaign. I said, “Well, that sounds great; let's talk about it.” And I don't really recall, I wasn't trying to be hard to get, I don't know why I didn't jump at the opportunity to go up there as his press secretary. But I think, really, I'd

just become very comfortable back in Columbia, South Carolina. And while I had always told Elliott Levitas, “I want to go to Washington if you get elected,” I sort of imagined, I can enjoy the good life back in Columbia. I know everybody, it seems like, I can keep working in politics down there. I wasn't sure I wanted to go to Washington any more. And my father died that year, and I felt a need to try to stay home closer to my mother. But I left the door open that, yes, maybe I would do this.

My fianc#e at the time — and I was married in December of 1978, right after the election — she thought it was very exciting. She was very active in Democrat politics, had been a big supporter of this Pug Ravenel person over the years. She was encouraging me to go. Well, anyway, there were two or three people that Campbell wanted to be his chief of staff in Washington that he'd been introduced to or knew of — the position, as you know, of administrative assistant. And they turned him down because they had other opportunities. And all of a sudden Campbell offered the position to me after they declined. And to be the head of the Washington office became a cut-and-dried decision for me, and I accepted, and on January 2nd I got in my car and drove to Washington, DC.

Q: So we're talking about '79. Can you talk about setting up a staff? Technically, I'm into social history. This is foreign affairs, but if I can have social and political history, I'll do it.

USSERY: Well, of course, I had no idea of how somebody sets up a congressional office. We were juggling immediately with the issues of who to hire, who to hire from the campaign staff, which office to put them in, who's the best up there. The retiring member of Congress, Tim Mann, had been a Democrat for 16 years — and Campbell shocked me by wanting to accede to Mann's request to hire two staff members of his Washington office. Not only did I see this as two of the planned positions, but I couldn't believe we were going to hire people who'd been working for a Democrat. Campbell assured me that these people weren't really Democrats; they were just professional staff. And they both turned out to be superb members of the Campbell team. But we were dealing with all the other issues of being very low, at the bottom of the ladder in seniority and trying to draw lots and

get the best office space we could possibly pick and figure out where to get equipment quickly. And I think the other issue was technology was really coming into the Congress at that time, and really in the last couple of years they introduced fully automated word processing systems and computer filing systems to the office. Systems, of course, we'd consider very rudimentary today by computer standards, but important decisions. We were all talking to different vendors trying to understand which way to go. So there I was at 27, they youngest administrative assistant in the US Congress, as new as anybody could be up there, staying with a member of the staff in an extra bedroom in her apartment where she and her husband and her child lived, trying to find my own place to live and trying to keep up with the start of the new Congress. I felt like it was a wind sprint. I was always trying to catch my breath and keep up for the first few months.

Q: What was the class of '78 like?

USSERY: '78 was really a very conservative group, but the Republicans had quite a few. I don't remember how many gains the Republicans made in 1978, but considerable. And it was considered to be a tough young group of conservatives for the most part. Almost all of them had supported Reagan — most of them, far and away, had supported Reagan over Ford in the '76 Republican nomination fight, and everybody had their eye on the 1980 Presidential election at that time, you know, which candidate they would support.

Q: When you arrived there, did the Republican Party have sort of classes for staff assistants?

USSERY: They did. They had classes and how-to's and all that. There were plenty of people you could go to for advice. In fact, maybe the problem was there were too many people you could go to, so the inclination was always to go to find the first person who knew what they were talking about and just do what they told you and get on with it.

Q: Once you sort of set up office, was your congressman — obviously he wasn't going to get the prime seats on the prime committees and all — maybe sometimes they are doled out — I mean, was this —

USSERY: Yes, fighting, if I can use that word, for prime committee assignments was a big deal. And Campbell was considered to be one of the darlings of the class of '78, just great-looking, articulate, southern conservative, who people said will go far. So he was really always on the short list of “workies” (freshmen) to get something good. There were others, I believe: Cheney, who had been chief of staff under Ford, who had been elected from Wyoming. Dick Cheney, future Secretary of Defense, was probably about the only congressman ahead of Campbell that was given first preference. But Campbell ended up, on his first term, on the Banking Committee and on the House Administration Committee. He'd wanted to be on the Ways and Means Committee or Appropriations. His second term he was put on Appropriations. His third term he was put on Ways and Means.

House Administration was important because HR-1 that year was a bill to reform campaign financing, and Campbell was one of the key co-sponsors of legislation to change the process which the Republicans viewed as heavily weighted towards unions and other traditional Democratic constituencies. So he really came out well for a freshman, ending up on Banking and House Administration. I think that was important to the base he was able to expand back in South Carolina.

Q: What was the role of chief of staff? What was the term actually?

USSERY: Yes, administrative assistant.

Q: Administrative assistant.

USSERY: Well, I think there is no one model of administrative assistant. They range from everything from heavy roles in the legislative process to making the trains run on time to being the top political advisor. My job — I can say, at 27 I was only green; I was

the youngest administrative assistant in the Congress — was to be one of his main political advisors, including people who were outside the office, businessmen back in South Carolina, and Lee Atwater, who later became chairman of the Republican Party of America, the Republican National Committee, and to be the guy who made the trains run on time. So those were my main functions in life for 10 years.

Q: When you were working with Campbell, what were the types of pressures that were coming from South Carolina as far as what people wanted?

USSERY: You know, there really weren't great pressures on Campbell that were tough to reconcile. We had some issues. We tried to save Amtrak train service going through South Carolina when Amtrak threatened over budget cuts that they may have to eliminate the train. Otherwise, we were pretty Republican on everything else in our positions. No, actually, I think Campbell was very blessed to be able to have a term that was ripe for his kind of view and issues.

Q: Military bases and things like that?

USSERY: Military bases weren't issues really during that time for him. It wasn't a big issue, and Campbell didn't actually have a military base in his district. But South Carolina is famous for lots of military bases otherwise.

Q: I would have thought that around Charleston it might sink.

USSERY: That's right. Charleston was hot, and you couldn't be the congressman for Charleston without going out there and talking about what was going to be done at the Navy Yard there. And in fact, my summer in my sophomore year, when I was a Pepsi route driver, my territory was the Fort Jackson military base, the largest training base for the US Army in America. But Campbell didn't have any hot issues that I recall on the military bases.

Q: What about on matters such as — well, most of the foreign affairs things would have been the Senate, wouldn't they?

USSERY: Well, foreign affairs, other than the Iran-Hostage Crisis, which there was very little anybody in Congress could honestly do except bemoan the situation, and Afghanistan, really, I mean, there were no decisions that Campbell was involved in that were central to foreign policy.

Q: What about special interest people? Did you find yourself all of a sudden wined and dined and the target of people, both inside and outside the government, who had their own agenda and were after you?

USSERY: Sure. I realized very quickly that the Carters were crowded with lobbyists and that Campbell all of a sudden was a target of a thousand banking lobbyists, as a member of that committee. But I think the other was that Campbell was seen as what you'd call an “up and comer.” And a lot of lobbyists wanted to know this new freshman who may go somewhere some day. I guess I enjoyed being wined and dined. I wasn't being wined and dined to try to move Campbell or influence his position or anything. I was just being wined and dined by people who wanted to know him in case he moved on to bigger and better things.

Q: So it was pretty apparent that there were a bunch of wolves out there trying to figure out who was going to be the plumpest sheep or whatever. I'm getting my metaphors mixed up, but anyway, there were a bunch of Washington operators making judgments all the time.

USSERY: That's right, and I think ingratiation was the term for their motives.

Q: What about campaign financing and all of this, for somebody on the Banking Committee? I would think this . . . it got worse, I imagine later on, but I mean, the

proportions of money that might go to somebody who's in a position to help a business could get to be pretty disturbing.

USSERY: For one thing, when we ran in 1978, we ran what would be an incredibly inexpensive campaign by today's standards. In fact, we had trouble raising enough money. We couldn't raise the money we thought was necessary to win that race, South Carolina being a relatively poor state and all that. By the time Campbell ran for reelection, he was a shoo-in, you know. He routed his opponent. And all the money he could imagine for that small district was available to him, including money from political action committees who didn't know who he was two years before. So sure, it's hard to work inside the political process without seeing the wrongs inside it and the reforms that are needed, but I also look at it this way. I remember the reforms that had been made, and I've yet to see a reform that, if I live 20 years later, doesn't look like a pretty bad reform that needs reforming itself. And so I imagine whatever we wind up doing on campaign financing will be as the last 20 years have been, just another law where people spend a lot of time on lawyers trying to figure out how you get around it and how you beat that system.

Q: And they will, and it's amazing.

USSERY: So yes, after having gone through that process in the late 1970's and now 20 years later looking at the mess in campaign financing, I'm now willing to look at and support radical concepts of either unlimited financing by individuals and no PAC's or corporations (as long as everything's reported) or very strict limits on individuals. But I don't think we spend too much money on politics relative to other things out there in the marketplace, when I look at the cost and everything. I don't think there's too much money going into campaigns, but I don't like where the money comes from or how it gets there or how people who live their life in public office are always raising money for the next darn campaign. So for the first time, while I'm not a supporter of public financing beyond the public financing that's in the presidential system, neither do I any more like corporations, through PAC's or any other means, being so powerful in politics.

Q: And during this thing, how long did you stay?

USSERY: One term. When I accepted the job with Campbell, I said, “I'll do it if I only have to do it for one term, because I think after two years, I'm going to want to go back to South Carolina and maybe I want to run for something myself, like the state legislature.” And there were certainly quite a few times when people would ask me that if Campbell ever ran for another office, would I run to fill his congressional seat back in Greenville and Spartanburg. I didn't think that's what I'd do, but I thought I'd enjoy something like the state legislature. But I always said, coming to Washington, “I don't know if I want to live in Washington, because of the traffic, and it's too cold for this Southern boy.”

And anyway, I came up here on the two-year plan; 20 years later I'm still up here. I cannot rule out that I'd ever live in South Carolina again, but my two biggest complaints about Washington do remain: the winters are too cold for me, and there's too darn much traffic out there.

Q: You mentioned Spartanburg was in your congressional district. This is a very interesting area in the United States. Could you talk about the international influence in this area?

USSERY: That's right. There were three great influences to note in the Greenville-Spartanburg area. One is Bob Jones University, a fundamentalist religious school, and so you can't be the Republican congressman from there without getting along with the powers that be at Bob Jones University. Second it was the home of Milliken Textiles and Roger Milliken, the largest private owned business in America at that time, and so textile and textile policy were big pressures — you had mentioned pressures earlier. And the third was that it was becoming one of the first international areas and a haven for foreign business investment in the South. And it still is. There's a free trade zone in the Spartanburg area. When Carroll Campbell was governor a few years ago, one of his great feats was beating all other states to get BMW to put their billion dollar plus foreign investment for manufacturing cars in South Carolina. So I don't ever recall it back in those

days being a pressure, but the internationalization of that part of South Carolina was underway.

Q: So you move up to 1980, and what happened?

USSERY: Oh, in 1980, one of the big things that happened was the Republican nomination for President, and so, let's say, really in the fall of 1979. The conventional wisdom was that Ronald Reagan was too old to be the nominee of the party. John Connolly, whom my wife went to work for in his Presidential campaign, was the hot prospect. There were several other candidates for the Republican nomination.

And Carroll Campbell became one of the first six Republican congressmen to support Ronald Reagan in 1980, even though Reagan had half the party with him, and virtually all the conservatives in 1976, the concerns about his age were so great, there was Campbell, as a freshman congressman, finding himself all of a sudden on the inside of the Reagan group. And of course, it gave him a nice ride in history, as Reagan swept into office. Campbell, by election day, was the Southern co-chairman of the Reagan campaign. And out of that, what happened was — we were very involved in the campaign — my friend Lee Atwater became the Southern strategist for the Reagan campaign at the age of — I don't know — 28 years old at that time. Campbell and Thurmond pushed for Atwater to be in the White House as political affairs officer for Reagan. They wanted their guy right there in the thick of political affairs, on the inside. And I went to Carroll and said, “Carroll, I've done my two-year commitment, but instead of going to South Carolina, would you help me get a job in the Reagan Administration? That sounds like that would be fascinating,” And he said, “Great.” But the way Carroll is, Carroll's the sort of guy, you've got to find the opportunity and then he helps push it through. He doesn't spend his time trying to make it up. He likes to be a closer on the end of the deal.

So I begin searching around and networking and finding out who was organizing which agencies and how it worked out, and I was talking to some people at the White House —

including Atwater — and they were trying to convince me to go to the Labor Department or Commerce Department because those issues would be dearest to the state of South Carolina, and it would be great experience for my career later. And I remember saying to them, “You know, I'd really love it if there was an opportunity to go work at the State Department.” And everybody would kind of look at the ceiling or look at the floor and hoo and ho and hum and moan and groan, and I remember saying, “Well, I know I've only been outside the United States one time in my life” — not counting Canada with my parents as a teenager — “I've just been over to Taiwan, and I know nothing about the world — I haven't seen it — but this has always been my interest, to see the world in this lifetime — life's short — and learn something about it. And foreign policy and international affairs are just a personal interest.”

Of course the way things work in politics like that, they said to me, “Well, we don't care that you don't have any experience in foreign policy. That's okay. We'll be glad to put one more amateur in there over at the State Department. That's not the issue. But the problem is, Al Haig's just not cooperating with us here at the White House. He's just putting in his own people, and he doesn't care who did what in the campaign. So sorry, we don't think we can help you.”

And I heard about the assistant secretary, a 33-year-old, the youngest ever assistant secretary for international organizations, Elliott Abrams, had been selected, and the word was he was looking for somebody who was into the Reagan people, because Abrams was a Democrat who had converted to supporting Reagan. He wanted somebody who was acceptable to the Reagan White House to be his congressional relations assistant. And I got myself in for an interview over there. Elliott and I hit it off, and he offered me a job in February of 1981 to come over to the State Department. And I left the Hill and came over as a GS-15 in international organizations, following what had seemed like a lifetime waiting on the security-clearance process to run through, so I think I actually arrived in August of 1981.

Q: What was your impression of the early Reagan team putting things together? I must say, having been around a long time, you watch the new teams, like the Kennedy team that came in, and how awfully inept, and young people running around thinking they're going to change the world — it just takes so bloody long to train them.

USSERY: Well, I found it was pure bedlam. I remember taking Lee Atwater to one meeting, dropping Lee off, and by March, the pressure was building incredibly. They fell so far behind on filling appointments, which they translated as being, you know, a serious problem for taking control of agencies. And so I began to wonder — can anybody really do it well? Can anybody really quickly and efficiently fill 3,000 positions with the best people in the best way, juggling political requirements versus capabilities? At the time I went to State, there were only 108 political appointees, probably about the same today. I felt very fortunate to have gotten my appointment at the agency with the least number of political appointees. But the whole system, Presidential personnel under Reagan, was drowning in its own weight, and finally the political affairs office, with pressure from the Republicans in Congress, broke through what was becoming a huge bottleneck in Presidential personnel at the White House in getting people into jobs. Besides the issue of control of the agencies, the other problem was there were a lot of loyal Reaganites who were out of work since the campaign, who deserved an opportunity to go to some agency and do their thing. So they started finally filling hundreds of Schedule C appointments rapidly, throwing people just into places, telling people “You go here, you go there.” Sometimes there wasn't a rhyme or reason as to where these people went, but in the end jobs got filled in the spring very much in that ad hoc fashion.

Q: You came in in August of '81. What was your impression of — essentially you had been working kind of out of the White House, hadn't you? I mean your main contacts had been with the White House.

USSERY: Yes, the main contacts —

Q: Before you went to the State Department.

USSERY: Before, yes, the White House.

Q: What was your impression of the new cadre of Reagan people and the White House, and the State Department and Alexander Haig?

USSERY: I'm sorry, tell me again what the question was.

Q: What was your impression of the outlook of . . . here are some brand new people coming together from the Administration. You have Alexander Haig, who's an outsider, had been a general and had been, in a way, at one point running the country at the end of the Nixon period, who was in a way his own man. I would have thought that this would have been a very bad fit. What was the attitude that you were getting from the people you were working with at the White House?

USSERY: You know, Haig was a lightning rod unto himself, but generally people said, or at least the Reaganites said, “He is the most qualified man.” But the issue that you really got into beyond positions not being filled was then the Reaganites were getting angry and saying, “My God, all of these Republicans from Ford and Nixon days who've been living in Washington and never helped Ronald Reagan are getting all the jobs, and all us Reaganites are being left in the cold.” And so you know I have no numbers to prove that, but that was a general concern, which probably happens with most administrations that come in after an absence from power. And at State it was certainly true. A lot of people who had good foreign policy backgrounds with Nixon and Ford were getting in under Haig. He didn't want to hear about what they did in the Reagan campaign. He cared that they were Republican, but he didn't want to be told any more than that. So fair enough, but when I got to State, and I looked at both the professional diplomats and the cadre or people and the caliber of people, I should say, that Haig was bringing in with foreign policy experience in other Republican administrations, I remember being in awe over there. I was

very impressed with the agency, how it ran, compared to my impression of other federal agencies, the talent. And it felt that I, coming in eight months into the Administration, was a lot behind the field and I had to quickly learn how this place worked, and second, try not to get in the way of all these experts around me or I'd be thrown out on my head as being the guy who just didn't fit in.

Q: As I do these interviews and I find myself going, as yesterday, to the American Enterprise Institute and other places, there are all sorts of nooks and crannies in the foreign affairs field where when one administration is out, or one's party is out, the people go — to the right or left. And they're well qualified, and they keep kind of doing their thing, and then when their party gets in they're all here in Washington — they're not somewhere else — and they all come back in. I mean, it's almost a revolving door, but it's very much a foreign affairs group. They all talk to each other. . . .

USSERY: I think there has to be a balance anywhere. I'd hate to think of total outsiders to Washington — no matter how loyal they've been to the candidate — coming in and trying to run the government. I think there has to be a balance. But I think that's one of the things that actually — while it can cause problems — gives strength to our system, to have a mix of people who are professional and political, a mix of people who are veterans with some outsiders coming in. Somewhere — in most cases — it sorts itself out maybe to give us a better system. But sure, I felt that I was one of the few people without foreign policy experience who was in the State Department at that time. I was treated very well because I was viewed as somebody who had gone through the battles and the trenches of the campaign, and I had a niche, working back with the Congress; but other than that, like I say, to me, I was over there feeling like the kid from A-class minor league ball in Greenwood, South Carolina, all of a sudden getting to play at Yankee Stadium, looking around and going, “Wow, it's fabulous to be here, but it's also a little bit scary.”

Q: Can you explain what International Organizations (IO) consisted of, and then could you talk about how Elliott Abrams operated in that area?

USSERY: International Organizations had responsibility for our policy generally in the United Nations, and most other international organizations except a few such as the Organization of American States. But it was an interesting situation, a 33-year-old assistant secretary who's supposed to give instructions to the United Nations, which was headed by a fellow neo-conservative who he'd known for many years, Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was sent up as ambassador to the UN with Cabinet rank. It was a recipe for problems. You have these two people who'd been colleagues, and one's got higher rank, and the other's giving orders to her. Some clashes ensued that could have been expected. But Abrams was a take-no-prisoners kind of guy. He was confident. He knew what he wanted to do. He didn't have a learning curve for the job, and we were heavy in the UN at that time on Mideast issues, with Israel going into Lebanon. Abrams was very smart politically, and I just had the greatest respect and admiration for him.

Q: What was your impression of Jeane Kirkpatrick from your perspective?

USSERY: A very smart intellectual, but at times tone-deaf politically and both frustrated by having to work inside a bureaucracy and performing poorly when trying to work inside a bureaucracy. What Jeane Kirkpatrick knew was what she felt to be right — not politically right — and she knew two ways to do things. One was to unilaterally do things and test her authority against Haig and Bill Clark, the National Security Advisor, and just get out and act. And the other was to call them up and the President up and get his blessing and say the hell with the State Department and its little instructions.

Q: You had not been involved in the foreign affairs field particularly, so you're new to this —

USSERY: Not particularly at all, yes.

Q: And I was wondering, did you find yourself developing an outlook or a philosophy of whither the United States in the world?

USSERY: Even though I had no experience in foreign policy and came into the State Department as probably the least traveled person there, I came in with strong beliefs about trying to reassert the US in world affairs and a very conservative foreign policy view. And certainly I came in as an interventionist. So I wasn't without my opinions. But I also knew I wasn't being paid to shape foreign policy; I was being paid to help execute it with the US Congress. But privately I had very strong views. I was very supportive of the Reagan and, well, we'll say Haig foreign policy in those days, very supportive. I mean from a standpoint of personal conviction, I was in the right place at the right time, which actually served me well in terms of developing a career in the State Department. It wasn't my plan or design. It just happened that maybe I was in the right place at the right time to move up the ladder once I got in there.

But I certainly had a bias for action in foreign policy. I was glad to see what we were doing. I often said that compared to Carter or Clinton or even Bush, it was easy to be a Reagan political appointee. No matter what you think about the policies at that time, right or wrong, if you sat in the US Government as a Reagan appointee, you felt like you understood what you were supposed to do for the President every day. If an issue came up, you knew more easily, or you could sense more accurately, what the White House would want you to do or not do on any given matter; whereas, like I say — pick another Republican — with Bush or Ford, with moderates, sometimes it's less clear what their foreign policy preferences would be, and so more is debated and more has to be thrashed out. But I found it very easy to figure out where we should be on almost any given issue, and so it was sort of simple to figure out. You didn't have to go to the White House. Maybe this is oversimplifying it, but you didn't go to the White House so much asking what the heck we should be doing; you felt comfortable knowing what you should be doing and working in a little bit more decentralized system.

Q: One of the things that people who come in from the political branch of the government find when they came into the State Department often is the warning "Watch out for those

Foreign Service officers: they're a bunch of slick cookies, and they'll put something over on you, or they'll co-opt you." Or the other one is, "These are a bunch of wimps, and they're too sensitive to foreign concerns and they don't understand what American concerns are."

USSERY: That's right.

Q: Were you getting this before you came in?

USSERY: Absolutely. Before I came in, and I was getting it more once I was in there, and people said, "Oh, you're at the State Department. What about those wimpy diplomats?" and everything. And we won't get into it, but I feel that the years and successes I enjoyed in the State Department were a product of my being a true Reaganite and conservative — so the Reaganites were always comfortable or happy with me — but being actually somebody who wasn't out with an agenda, didn't have a built in bias against the foreign policy, who was instantly impressed and had great respect for the diplomats. So I got along very well with all of them, and they quickly sized me up as not being a Foreign Service basher and, I think, by nature just being somebody who gets along with almost anybody. And I think that served me.

And in fact, in a couple of cases which I'm sure we'll talk about later, you know, I think I've had some great opportunities by not always being the first choice (as I told you, I wasn't the first choice to be administrative assistant), but always being more of a broad, acceptable choice. And I'll tell you later about a time where the top two candidates, each side was shooting the other side's candidate and I was third on the list, and I got that job, because everybody on each side said, "Well, we both can work with Mike; let's get Mike in there."

Q: Did you sense right away a problem between the State Department perspective and Jeane Kirkpatrick? She had won Ronald Reagan's heart with an article, I guess it was in Foreign Affairs, wasn't it?

USSERY: Yes.

Q: As a conservative Democrat who essentially — correct me if I'm wrong on this — was saying that we're in a cold war and if we're going to support anybody, particularly in Latin America, we should support these authoritarian figures because they're to the right. And there were some pretty unsavory . . . I mean, at the very beginning, Latin America was pretty well dominated by military dictators. Was this view accepted within the State Department, would you say?

USSERY: Was it accepted within the State Department? I don't know that it was. I really think that at points in the Cold War we continued to try to balance the lesser of two evils in many situations while we tried to shift between Republican and Democrat administrations on these kind of questions. I'm not sure if it wasn't until some time in more like the '80's, or maybe it was more specifically the breakup of the Eastern Bloc and Communism, that we were able to find some kind of level of harmony about how to deal in these regions. So I really sensed, I felt, a constant debate, particularly in terms of Central America, and down in South America, about where we should be.

I remember I went with Secretary Shultz in, I want to say, May of '84 or '85, down to the inauguration of the President of Uruguay, following 16 years of military rule. What a fantastic experience that was seeing hundreds of thousands of people celebrating in the streets all night long. But on the way down, the big decision in the airplane was whether or not Shultz should agree to a meeting with Nicaraguan leader Daniel Ortega in Montevideo.

On the way down, I think it was Charlie Hill, the equivalent of the chief of staff to Shultz, had the idea that at our Ecuador stopover we'd spend an extra three or four hours with the Ecuadorians because the reports were that more than ten thousand pro-Ortega sympathizers were lined up with placards outside our hotel waiting for Shultz's arrival. And by delaying three or four hours we'd arrive at about two o'clock in the morning when there are only 300 left. But Shultz, as I recall, did meet with Ortega. They had a very tough

session. . . . But back to your point: it was a tough time. Between Duarte in El Salvador, who was our friend, and Ortega, who was our enemy, sometimes it was hard to tell who the good guys really were or if there were any good guys at the table.

Q: Just to get this, you were with Elliott Abrams in the IO job from when to when?

USSERY: Well, Abrams left, I believe, in 1982 to become assistant secretary of human rights, and then on to assistant secretary for Latin America, where he got caught up in the Iran-Contra scandal and derailed a really fast-rising career. I stayed in the IO Bureau. Abrams asked me if I wanted to go to Human Rights, and I really didn't. I really thought that International Organizations was more personally interesting to me. Greg Newell came over, and he broke Elliott's record of being a 33-year-old assistant secretary. Newell came over from the White House and became a 32-year-old assistant secretary, but without any foreign policy experience. And Greg said he'd heard about me and heard good things and told me if I wanted to stay and keep my job I could. And I did. So from 1981 until 1983, two full years, I was in the International Organizations Bureau.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point, and I'll just put at the end where we can pick this up. You're in IO, where you were from '81 to '83. We've talked about how Elliott Abrams operated. You've talked a bit about Jeane Kirkpatrick, but first with the Abrams period we should probably talk about some of the issues that came up and what your job was and how you found operating within the Department of State and all at that time.

USSERY: Sure. Elliott and I only worked together eight or nine months. I think the issue that really broke is Greg Newell came in and made a decision in his own mind that he was going to take the US out of UNESCO, and that was my first real immersion into the real machinery of foreign policy.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then.

USSERY: Good.

Q: Today is the 9th of December, 1998. Mike, you see where we were, so do you want to carry on from there?

USSERY: Okay, yes. Well, anyway, as I say, I was delighted to be at State. I was having a fabulous experience in IO. I was impressed with the machinery and, well, all the machinations and mechanics of foreign policy. I was happy to be working with Elliott Abrams, who at the time was the youngest assistant secretary of State in the history of the Department. People speculated that Elliott Abrams some day might be a Secretary of State himself — a really bright, sharp mind, a guy who became assistant secretary three times: International Organizations, Human Rights, and Latin America; who was the man of the hour in Latin America, and then became derailed by the Iran-Contra scandal.

Newell was interesting. Unlike Elliott, who was educated in the London School of Economics, and had a foreign policy background up in the Congress, Newell came down at the age of 32 and replaced Elliott as the youngest assistant secretary ever, but he came from the White House, where he was doing scheduling. And from the get-go people said, well, Newell is a very strange choice to be an assistant secretary of State. He didn't have the background for it, but the powerful deputy chief of staff, Mike Deaver, was close to Newell. Newell wanted to be over there replacing Abrams. He was given the opportunity, airlifted in by the White House, if you will. He started off with a lot of doubters out there. He didn't have a strong formal education, and I think he even dropped out of college for a while, didn't really have an impressive background until he jumped into politics a few years before with Reagan.

Newell, though, like Abrams, came in with a total take-charge attitude, knew where he wanted to go, and I was always impressed with Greg's diligence and just determination and hard work. He also tried to learn quickly from Elliott's biggest problem, which was Elliott's confrontations with Kirkpatrick, who was a member of the Cabinet, even though she was supposed to be getting her daily instructions from Elliott Abrams. Newell was determined to try to get along, coexist well with Jeane Kirkpatrick, and he realized that

he didn't have the foreign policy bona fides to be trying to have issues constantly taken up with the secretary or the White House in debates between Kirkpatrick and himself. Elliott was very focused on fighting across the board the new issue of UN budgets and the American contribution to UN organizations and being tough on all of the different institutions. Greg said, “Let's get out of UNESCO.” And he really knew where he wanted to go on the issue, and then tried to set up the mechanisms to get us there, starting with a thorough top-to-bottom scrub-down study of UNESCO, which ostensibly was designed to review the question of future US participation in UNESCO.

Greg invited scientific associations in America, experts from all kinds of fields — in culture, education, et cetera — who would have any kind of dealing or observations about UNESCO to participate; and pretty soon it became a major issue and major lobbying all the way around. And it was interesting — I would say on balance, most of the organizations, of course, in the US, associations and others, even though they were all critical to some degree of UNESCO, they often were at the UNESCO trough, and very few really wanted to drop out of UNESCO. So soon it became a case where the choices seemed to be: to completely drop out of UNESCO, or do we withhold some money, make some big warnings (do we give maybe some type of ultimatum?) and Greg never lost sight of the fact that he knew he wanted to pull out, and he kept moving in the direction of pulling out. And it was often said that he was so far down the track of pulling out, that by the time that Secretary Shultz and those on the Seventh Floor of the State Department really realized where it was going, as the matter heated up in Congress and elsewhere, that Greg had really quite masterfully boxed them in and put the Secretary in a position where it would be very tough not to drop out of UNESCO. I can't tell you if that's exactly dead-on true. Certainly the Secretary took some heat from some of these same organizations, but I think on balance benefited from appearing tough and pulling out of UNESCO. Greg was featured in a big press conference, got his picture in Time Magazine and all as the guy who pulled the plug on UNESCO, and I think, really, that was far and away the core of the experience I had there.

Soon after we pulled out of UNESCO, Greg himself was starting to look for other pastures. And I was very content there. I was sort of a pig in mud, just delighted to be at the State Department. I wasn't thinking about what to do next. I just sort of thought that maybe sometime I'd go back and do something else in politics. I wasn't plotting a career for myself. And Abrams — I'd mentioned I turned down his offer to stay with him and go to the Human Rights Bureau. I really just felt personally much more interested in the UN issues than the human rights issues. In about '84, Greg parlayed the UNESCO issue into becoming the US ambassador to Sweden, also said to be over the objections of George Shultz, who actually just wanted after the '84 elections, when President Reagan was reelected, to fire Greg along with a few other assistant secretaries that he'd inherited from Al Haig and really shake the place up. Basically, again, Deaver told him he could get rid of Greg, but only off to a nice ambassadorial post, where Greg spent, I think, about four years.

But in 1983, while I was doing my congressional liaison for the International Organizations Bureau, I received a call and was asked if I'd be interested in being the State Department's what they called White House liaison, in the Management Bureau, which is a liaison of the Presidential appointments, all the senior executive service appointments, and all the Schedule C political appointments in the Department. I, in fact, was called and asked by another Reagan political appointee that I didn't know very well, and I was sort of surprised that somebody had even thought of me. And I said, “Yes, that sounds exciting,” and in about a week's time I'd met with Ron Spiers, the under secretary of management, I'd met with John Harrington, the head of Presidential Personnel in the White House, and was installed in '83 as the White House liaison for the Department.

Q: Well, I want to go back to the IO period. With the UNESCO thing, this is sort of an article of faith to get us out of this, particularly the — I wouldn't call it isolationist, but — right wing of the Republican Party who didn't like the UN at all, and UNESCO was a good solid target, an unpopular head of it —

USSERY: M'bow.

Q: But there were elements that were beneficial. What was the feeling when Newell came in with this in mind within the IO organization?

USSERY: I think within the IO organization, in terms of trying to get with the program or make the program for President Reagan, the view was to be tough across the board, try to be cutting budgets everywhere, trying to bring in management review. It was very much work within the system, be the tough guy within the system. I think your point's right, that for the conservatives, and for Newell particularly, the idea was really, you're going to get more maximum effect by finding something big to drop out of and to really shock the UN system. And as you say, UNESCO was by far the most criticized for its lavish posh lifestyle and offices in Paris and, you know, lots of challenges to the results it had out in the field. But the intention was very much, I think — it wasn't just about UNESCO. It was about finding something to quit and to try to shake up the entire UN.

Q: Did you have any problems with the press and all in this? I mean, were there elements within the press that were strong supporters of staying in, or was this a —

USSERY: I was surprised, and probably more surprised years later looking back, because when the press really started to pay attention to it, it was almost really at the moment that we announced that we were dropping out. I think we had to give a year's notice in advance of that withdrawal. And I think, in part, it wasn't considered to be on the level of the Mideast Peace Process issues or something like that. There was a lot going on in El Salvador and Lebanon, you know, Grenada. There were a lot of issues out there at the time. The Cold War. So UNESCO was definitely a secondary issue. And the other is, I think, that there was some criticism within the press of UNESCO anyway, and so, no, compared to some media issues I later was involved in trying to manage, it was kind of a piece of cake, really.

Q: I'm not sure of the timing, but at one point UNESCO was coming out by saying that the press is an internal matter and there's nothing wrong with government's controlling it. Had that happened?

USSERY: That's right, exactly. That was why, for the press, there wasn't a lot of sympathy about it, and it made it easier, and it certainly made it easier in Congress, after those kind of sentiments were pouring out of UNESCO.

Q: Well, okay, let's move to the appointments area or the White House liaison. You were doing that from when to when?

USSERY: From 1983 to '85.

Q: Where were your offices located?

USSERY: Actually also on the sixth floor, but I was right next door to the distinguished ambassador at large, General Vernon Walters. He was my next-door neighbor, so we got to be very good buddies. Of course, he became very important to me later because he was for many years the American closest to King Hassan. He became something of a guiding light, and he and I went to see King Hassan at least three times during my time in Morocco. But I was in room 6311, as I recall.

Q: Talk about your job at that time, '83 to '85. Let's see, '83, you would have taken care of . . . the next election was —

USSERY: '84, when Reagan crushed Mondale. When I came in in 1983, there were two dimensions to the job. I loved them both. One was the personnel side, being right in the middle of what at that time — and I was a little bit na#ve upon entry — was a big confrontation, a general confrontation, between the State Department and the White House. The President had appointed more political appointees to ambassadorships than anybody else in history, and not only was he turning down more Foreign Service officers

for some key posts, but was also getting into disallowing some Foreign Service officers based on what was believed to be their background or political preferences. And so there was a nasty little innuendo about that issue.

Q: When you say the President, it was really more the White House, wasn't it?

USSERY: Absolutely, absolutely. That's right. I mean, the President certainly had people he wanted to have as ambassadors, but the President could have had all his wishes and druthers and there still would have been more than a 70 percent Foreign Service, 30 percent political appointee balance. Instead, about that time, as I recall, Stu, I think there was 60 percent Foreign Service, and the political ambassadorial appointees had gone to 40 percent.

Q: Yes, that's as bad as it's been.

USSERY: The White House was a little indignant on the other side, because what you call the Schedule C, the political appointee positions, what were called grade 15 and above, the State Department by far had the least number of Schedule C appointments of any federal agency. It had about 108 at that time, whereas the Energy Department had 700, Health and Human Services had over a thousand. So the White House view was always that they had the least control over the State Department. So everybody was out there being quite uncivil most of the time.

The other dimension of the job I'll just touch on is, this was the office that was responsible for helping organize and participate on all US delegations overseas. If there was an inauguration, if there was a funeral, if there was a grand anniversary in some country, the President, if he didn't pick somebody like the Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense to go represent him, he might assemble a private sector delegation — again, some of the President's friends and buddies as well as distinguished individuals might be invited to go

to Thailand. And my deputy or I would usually go on those trips, so I saw the world through this job. I went to more than 30 countries in two years thanks to Uncle Sam.

Q: And these delegations, of course, are real goodies that are handed out.

USSERY: Mmm, real goodies.

Q: And so you were involved with the people who may have wanted to get on that.

USSERY: Yes. Those were consolation prizes for people who were not selected as ambassadors, people who were great friends and fund-givers to the President who weren't interested in working in Washington but they wanted to do something for them. And to say we went first class was an understatement. We would take one of the Presidential aircraft from Andrews Air Force Base, some big huge airplane configured with special tables inside and everything and lavish dinners. I think only a few times did we ever go on commercial flights. I remember taking Secretary of Labor Ann McLaughlin to Yugoslavia on a first-class commercial flight. There were about 10 of us in that group. Most of the time we'd have dedicated chartered aircraft, just a real trip, so to speak.

Q: Let's talk about this side of the job before we move on to the other. These delegations, were there, in a way, handlers who went along, either Foreign Service or somebody else? Because when you have a delegation, when these are all private citizens, they're enjoying it, but they have to be . . . I mean, you're in another country who's the host and all, and there are people who want to do their own thing and are not the easiest people to be with — I mean, not in general, but —

USSERY: Oh, yes, sure. You quickly learned that. You quickly learned that you were going to end up with some prickly personalities on the trip, you were going to have some people who felt a little high and mighty and you could never quite please them. But I would say that was 10 percent of the time. 90 percent of the people, after a few days, you really feel like you've become very friendly with them, you've had a great time, a lifetime experience.

I remember one of these trips was part of the undoing of Deputy Secretary Ken Damm, who was hand-picked by George Shultz to come in. He went to the Independence of Brunei, and I remember sitting there with the several-hundred-pound king of Tonga (who they made special chairs for and he ate 12 chickens for breakfast) and Prince Charles, and I sort of said, Now, what am I doing here? I've done something right: Brunei, a country of 250,000 people and one of the richest people in the world . . . the Sultan. I went out with Sean Randolph, a friend of mine from the East Asia Bureau. We chartered a boat and went up into the jungle and found that very few Bruneians had ever been in the jungle. They wanted to know why anyone would want to go up there; it's just a jungle. We managed to hit a log, knock out the engine of the boat, and spent a half day out in a jungle river; but we got off and saw village people and the Borneo area. It was great. We went on to Thailand on that same trip and had a great time. Ken Damm, though, stayed at the front of the plane, wouldn't interact very much with the friends of the President. I was back there with them. And it was one of those things that contributed to the attacks on Damm that he actually ended up leaving the Department, I think a couple of years later, never quite in with the Reaganites.

But I met King Juan Carlos in Spain when I went with the National Security Advisor Bill Clark on a trip for some anniversary in Spain down on Mallorca. I could go on and on about endless numbers of trips. Those were my favorites. We covered Presidential elections in some countries, like El Salvador, and on one trip, Secretary Shultz headed this delegation, and this was when Secretary Shultz had just come to the Department replacing Secretary Haig. And I introduced myself on the airplane to Secretary Shultz, and I said, “Mr. Secretary, I'm Mike Ussery. I'm your White House liaison.” And he looked at me and he said, “I'm my White House liaison.” Well . . . then he kept on walking. Well, at that point I thought, Oh, great, I've must lost my job, you know. And he was talking to his executive assistant, his chief of staff, what was his name?

Q: Charlie Hill?

USSERY: Charlie Hill, thank you, Charlie Hill, who always was very nice to me. I could tell he was talking to Charlie and asking him what the hell was a White House liaison and who the hell is this guy? But after that things actually went great. And we stopped in Ecuador and were on our way down for the Independence of Uruguay, which I think was after — I always want to say 11, but I think was actually 16 years of military rule. And in Ecuador we got word that there were thousands of demonstrators waiting to heckle the Secretary on the Nicaragua issue and that President Ortega of Nicaragua was already down in Uruguay publicly saying he wanted to meet down there with Secretary Shultz. So Charlie Hill, being the clever guy that he was, first thing he did was he decided to delay our trip. We extended our trip in Ecuador with President Febres Cordero (who became the Colt 45 gun-packing president of Ecuador, who was replaced a few years later, kidnapped and all) so that we would arrive in Uruguay, in Montevideo, at about two o'clock in the morning. And so then the 10,000 demonstrators had whittled down to 200 by the time we pulled into the hotel. It was very clever.

And on the way down, though, Secretary Shultz called a meeting. Again, not quite sure who I was, he called me up into the front cabin of this private airplane, and he asked everybody — Tony Motley was the assistant secretary for Latin America at the time — and he went around the room and he said, “I want everybody's opinion” of whether or not he should meet with the president of Nicaragua, Ortega, or snub him down there. And first he asked Motley, who recommended a meeting, and he asked somebody from the National Security Council. And I didn't know he was going to ask me. I thought I was just sitting around there. And he said, “And you, what do you think?” And you know, I think Motley about died — the idea of, well, what the hell is he asking this guy for? But I supported Motley's view, so I kept harmony on the plane. The Secretary did have a good meeting with Ortega down there. It played fine back in the States. It didn't cause problems with the conservatives here, which was the big worry of Shultz. And so I had some fantastic trips like that, learned about foreign policy, and as I say, I saw the world.

Q: Did you have problems of people wanting to get on the delegation?

USSERY: Ha, ha, ha. That's a great question, Stu. In fact, these trips became so famous and so popular, it wasn't just great businessmen sitting back hoping some day President Reagan would ask them to do something. There was a frenetic lobbying going on, people hearing about things coming up, and coronations and all, and posturing. And so it became a lot of politics. But really my role was less in that than it was in the actual political appointment, ambassadorial appointment itself, because this got into knowing who was who from the campaign and the old Reagan days and balancing all that out. And I really didn't know the history of who all these people were, and that was much more of a White House call.

Q: Okay, let's talk about the realities of what you were doing.

USSERY: Yes.

Q: You were right in the middle between the White House political side and the sort of establishment of the State Department over ambassadorial appointments. When you arrived, did you get any sort of instruction on how you were to perform?

USSERY: Yes.

Q: And then how did it work out.

USSERY: I really received instructions from Under Secretary Spiers, who said we've got to find a better way to do this and get our message across at the White House. And I pretty much got instruction from the White House that we've got to make sure the State Department stops sending over crazy candidates for things and realizes that we're not also going to give up any of our designated political slots for their guys. So of course, really, I had conflicting or contradictory advice, but I think the wonderful thing about that job — I kept phone logs — I was on 50 to 75 phone calls every day. Sometimes, a couple of times,

I'd lose my voice in that job, sometimes talking two or three times to the same people. It was like being a stock broker in pre-high-computer days, just on the phone — boom, boom, boom — all the time. And I learned — it might have been a skill I was well suited for, but it wasn't necessarily a skill I brought to the job — but for 15 years, from that job on, I've essentially thrived at my best at finding myself, whether in business or in government, being in the middle of processes where the main thing you can be, when you're in the middle, is you've got to have trust from both sides, and if you can put yourself in the middle between two parties, and they both trust you, there are a lot of opportunities to create win-win situations — and win for yourself. And so I learned a lot about being in the middle from that job, and I learned a lot about the power of information. And I was surprised how often I might find out information about what was going to happen that would be totally unknown to one side, or I'd find out information about a candidate that I could end up bringing in because, without even searching, the office itself was the focal point of a lot of information. You know, people I'd never met before would call me up because they heard that candidate Joe Blow was trying to get such and such job. They'd either call up telling me how wonderful he was and please pass on to all the right people why he's wonderful — congressmen would call me and say, “Mike, I'm Congressman So-and-so, you know, Danny would be perfect for that job.” And you know, all of a sudden I get a chance to pass along a lot of favors. You know, I'm trying to do the right thing, but at the same time Congressman So-and-so never forgets old Danny got that job. I didn't do it just because of the congressman.

Or a lot of times people would call and say, “My God, we hear Danny's up for that job. You need to know this is the biggest son-of-a-bitch in Utah.” And so I was always parlaying information, and I felt that in the end both the White House and the State Department were very happy with where we took the process. We improved on the problem considerably. I became friends with many Foreign Service officers, as well as became known at the White House outside of the political office of the White House, which is the area that knew me from the campaign. So I had a whole different part of the White House, old Reagan

cronies, who I developed relationships with. Some are friends I'm still very close to today, and in fact, I'll explain a little bit how it led to my next job in the State Department. But I remember, I felt it was, if you may excuse the word, a position that had some power or clout to it for a job that we'd call a GS-15, a Schedule C job. It wasn't the highest title or position you could have, but it was one where you could wheel and deal.

I remember one time there were two Foreign Service candidates up for Trinidad and Tobago, and so the White House was going to decide. And one of them was Sheldon Krys, and I remember going to Sheldon one time — he didn't know I was kidding with him — and I told him that I'd worked out a compromise. That he would be ambassador to Trinidad and the other guy was going to get Tobago. But the situation was such at the time — and the State Department believed the White House was capable of anything — he believed me when I told him. Actually, he was crestfallen at the idea he was going to have these little islands divided up.

In another case, I was able to help, I remember, Roger Kirk become ambassador to Romania, which ironically was a place with which I became familiar in years to come. I knew Roger and he wasn't being appreciated, and basically I structured tradeoffs. They would do at least five and usually 10 to 15 countries at a time. They'd make decisions. They weren't doing just one at a time. There would be big meetings, combined meetings of people from the White House — Deaver, Harrington — the deputy secretary of State, others, Spiers. And they really became horse-trading sessions.

Q: You were sitting in on these.

USSERY: No, I wasn't. I was actually preparing those. And I remember one time I think I felt like, well, I'd really learned my job because I really proposed a whole slate with switches and slots and proposed trades where somebody, a political appointee, would end up taking a small post in Africa and Roger Kirk got Romania in the exchange, and it all worked out the way I . . . you know, I'd finally learned how to . . . you couldn't always

control that process, but. . . . The downside of all that, to do that horse-trading and all, was sometimes people went to some odd places that weren't really perfectly suited for their background. You might have somebody that was up to be ambassador to a post that he was a natural for, but the White House was never going to let it happen. But rather than have had this person just crushed and a lot of resentment throughout the State Department at that person not receiving it and being bumped by a political appointee, I would work hard to find another post for him or even delay that ambassadorial selection until another round when we could find something for that person and have everybody swapped in at the same time.

Q: You'd say you're appointing, you know, "Danny has been suggested," and often I can see where you have somebody who comes out of a senator's or congressman's district and they think they're grand, but when you sort of lift the lid off that person's career, some peculiar odors start coming up.

USSERY: I think there were two things. . . . Yes?

Q: This would be something that the White House wouldn't know about — nobody would know about it except people who lived in the area. What would happen when you would come across something like this?

USSERY: Well, I think one of the things, I had my antenna up both to pick up that kind of information but the other is to have the antenna up to know what the White House already thought. And sometimes I saw that there was nothing I could do other than to stand in front of a moving train, because the White House was already so committed to some turkey it didn't matter.

But I thought there were two ends to the job, just to touch on them. One was that, yes, certainly, we saw some real yokels going out under political appointments. And I'd say, in most of the cases, while there were a few surprises, most of the cases, if they didn't get bumped in the senatorial process and their shortcomings come out, they became rather

disastrous ambassadorial appointments, and so by the middle of Reagan's term, it helped shift their thinking that, you know, the caliber and the qualities they looked for in people were better, I think, than what they were in 1981.

Q: I think this is par for every administration, tending more towards the professionally than the partisan, but there's another part of this, and I don't know if you get into it, something I talked to colleagues of mine who were in the Foreign Service and all, and certain disquiet. . . . In fact, I was talking to the head of senior personnel this morning, just before I came here, and she was just recently an ambassador, and she's in charge of senior personnel. And she says it's disgusting what happens on the sixth and the seventh floor about the people who are fairly high-ranking trying to get their staff aides appointments as ambassadors, which many aren't qualified for. I mean, they don't have the administrative experience and are just bright young people.

USSERY: I saw that too. I saw the idea that everybody thought . . . it became too much of a buddy system inside the State Department too. And I thought the real issue that was captured more — and I was trying to help on and I was sympathetic with Ron Spiers, in the mid-'80's — was that it sort of became a premium, or more value, to be an executive assistant to somebody in Washington than to distinguish yourself out in the field.

Q: Absolutely.

USSERY: And it became better to be in Washington, be seen, know people in the hallways and meetings, than to go out and represent your country at a very tough post. And I thought that the State Department was starting to lose that, and a lot of the times it was political appointees who came in and who thought that the guy who was the best executive assistant that they could have ever imagined, they couldn't figure out that there were also a lot of well trained Foreign Service people out there who could have done just as well or would have done a great job if they'd been in there. And they'd do like, “My assistant's got

to be taken care of." And there was a lot of leapfrogging. And I don't know how much that had gone on before my time. I was interested to hear you say it, certainly —

Q: It's endemic to the system, and the people in the Foreign Service who rail against political appointees don't usually focus on this other buddy system, of people who are good executive assistants — which is probably, I would put at the lower 10 percent of jobs that are good training to be an ambassador.

USSERY: Well, what I saw, when I went into the Near East Bureau as a deputy assistant secretary, of course, I participated very heavily in what they called the "meat market." Having everybody sit around, they'd take out all the bids for all the posts, all the Washington jobs, all the embassy jobs, and go through the selection process. And I was just really shocked from the beginning to find out how much personal knowledge of somebody counted, and how if you weren't already known, it was pretty tough to get a job; and how much people would say, "Oh, I knew Maria from Pakistan 10 years ago — she's good." You may not even know what she's really done in the past 10 years, except what they can read on the sheet in front of them, but it doesn't really say she exemplified a position or what. And I told many people on the outside that, really, bureaucracies I don't think can design systems that shake out the personal relationship dynamics. It's too heavy.

But anyway, at that time, you were starting to see, particularly now you mentioned Clinton, in Reagan's second term, as political appointees were leaving top levels, they always tried to do as they would do in a political world, trying to take care of their assistants, but you know, in incredibly stretching ways, beyond what would be the right thing to do. And maybe some people who might have deserved to go out and have a shot as a DCM somewhere were instead being put up to be ambassador. So as you say, it's endemic within the system.

Q: Did you have any cases or problems in those years, particularly that you remember and that you can talk about an all?

USSERY: Let me just say that inside the State Department, and again I think you see some irony in what happens to me later, because again while I was doing this, I actually left the State Department. I'm the only person I know who's resigned from the State Department three times. Let me get that on the record. Maybe others have, but after Reagan's election in '84, I announced my decision to retire and go in to private consulting, and by the middle of '85, to give Ron Spiers time to find my replacement. And so I say that to prove I wasn't a guy out there trying to spend 11 years in the State Department. So I always felt inside, as the White House liaison, and particularly seeing a two-term administration, one of the problems I thought we had was we were also overlooking political appointees inside the State Department getting promotions to other political appointments, and I thought it was very strange that some people who were doing stellar work as political appointees for three, four or five years for Reagan were being passed over by old cronies and businessmen from the outside. And I thought it was also a sort of bad signal. I wanted the message to be that if you served Reagan inside, as a political appointee — and I told John Harrington at the White House this — you can bet you're going to be considered when something higher comes up — maybe it's your boss leaves or something like this, or an embassy opens in an area of the world you've been working on — and to know this might some day apply to me, as it turned out to. So I was very proud of about three people who had worked inside the State Department in about '84/85, because of their work as political appointees, I was able to secure ambassadorships for them.

The other issue inside the State Department that was driving the White House crazy, was political appointments were being filled either by political appointees who were in high positions or by Foreign Service people who had political appointees under them. And the White House would go absolutely bonkers. The way they did it was, they said, “Here, here are some r#sum#s. We would be happy if you selected any one of these people.” Half the time, somebody would come back, particularly if there was a Foreign Service person doing the hiring or whatever, and they'd come back and they'd propose somebody

else. Well, what they'd propose would usually be a Republican, nine times our of ten — sometimes it wouldn't even be a Republican — but they'd say, “Well, this is a Republican; why can't we hire this one?” And the White House would go crazy and say, “This isn't a Reagan Republican. This isn't a conservative Republican. This is some damned Nelson Rockefeller Republican or some guy who never did anything to help Ronald Reagan get elected.” That was another issue, and I butted heads one time with Rick Burt, who at the time was assistant secretary of State for Europe. He tried to put one of these guys who maybe he's a Democrat, maybe a Republican, into a spot, and I said, “Rick, you're a political appointee yourself — come on.” He said, “I know, but this guy is the best guy out there.” And you know, I would go up. I couldn't block the position from being given to that guy, but we blocked the guy from getting the grade and title. That was, you know, bureaucratic mischief-ness. Anyway, today Rick and I work very closely together, and so I'm glad I learned that if you bump heads in the right way, you can still maintain amicable relations over the long term. And I think your point's well taken. I don't think the problem's changed.

But when I was back there with Reagan, I was beginning to think, because we did break some ceilings, that Reagan was creating problems that nobody had ever heard of before, but now really I've learned that these are age-old problems and they'll never be totally resolved to anybody's satisfaction.

Q: Did you find screams and yowls about reaching down? I know farther down — consul general in Bermuda — things that normally —

USSERY: Yes, that's right, the famous consul general in Bermuda post that was filled by a succession of political appointees. It was an exception. Thank God this didn't become a more widespread problem. And it was patently understood that this person was going out to have a damned grand time at a lovely place and have fun and don't bother him. And in fact, Max Friedensdorf, who headed up Congressional Relations the first three years for Reagan, became one of those three people, and he went on to become senior vice

president of Pepsi-Cola. But there was a little bit of that, and I think there was an issue where Ron Spiers really drew a tough line, that you're not going to encroach on these kind of positions, and we're not going to let you (the White House) get involved heavily into “this guy ought to be the deputy chief of mission” and picking one Foreign Service officer over another. So there were lines drawn in that, and I think those worked pretty well.

The other thing I was involved in, I think was a small issue, but it had big repercussions and it as a distasteful issue, which was that when Foreign Service officers were nominated for ambassadorships they had to fill out forms that indicated — they were asked, you know — “Are you Republican or are you Democrat, independent? Did you vote in the last election? Did you vote in a primary? Indicate the primary.” Well, the White House maintained it was not using any of that information to screen out people, but one wonders. They even tried to block a couple of Foreign Service officers — and a couple of political appointees — when they found they didn't vote in the last election. But a lot of times Foreign Service officers — sometimes, you're overseas; it's not so easy, or whatever. After a little grousing or whatever, we were able early on, in '83, I think, to persuade the White House to drop all this kind of background questions that seemed to be suggesting a party, for example. Well, there were a couple of cases where people who were considered to be highly qualified for ambassadorial posts were turned down based on what they had done in the Carter Administration. One was — he became ambassador to Nigeria later, a big African hand, famous DAS in Africa. . . .

Q: It's not ringing a bell.

USSERY: People say he sort of wrote the Carter Doctrine on Africa, but his name escapes me. Another was a fellow who had been ambassador, or was he going to be ambassador to Sri Lanka, or eventually became ambassador? Who's Sri Lanka?

Q: Well, we can fill these in later. It's really. . . .

USSERY: Okay, there were a couple of those cases where things got pretty testy between the White House and State when these couple of individuals were involved. The White House said, “No, these people were front and center in developing Carter's policies that we're undoing, and we're not going to send them.” And finally they worked out a compromise that they wouldn't block these people forever from being ambassadors; they'd stopped them that one time and they'd reconsider them and let them be ambassadors after another time, a little more proving some service in the Reagan Administration somewhere, as long as they weren't sent to the same part of the world where they had been taking such a high profile for Carter. And that finally sort of, in effect, made the issue go away.

Q: Did you have any problems with Foreign Service officers who would go to their buddies up on the Hill or something of this nature?

USSERY: Ha, I think your questions sound like you worked in management or something back then, or in Personnel. Yes, Foreign Service officers were certainly guilty of politicking, and sort of along the lines of “my best friend's Jewish.” It was getting ridiculous having Foreign Service officers request to meet me before they would be considered. Most wouldn't. Most were very proper, kept their hands off it. Some coming in would tell me how their best friends are Republican, or this great Republican reference, Al D'Amato, Senator D'Amato would recommend them, or whatever. Generally I would not pass on that kind of information to the White House. You know, the fact that some guy claimed he voted for Reagan in '80 or that some Republicans like him — I just felt like it really wasn't central to the issue; and unless some guy . . . a couple of times we had Foreign Service officers come in and say, “The reason I didn't go anywhere in the Carter Administration was they suspected I was a conservative.” There was a famous case, a guy named John Glassman. And this was one of those times where the conservatives felt there were a few Foreign Service officers that were really Reaganites and did try to get into that process, and there was one fight. Glassman became DCM in Barbados because Trent Lott's former chief of staff, Tom Anderson, wanted to select him, but he wasn't one of the five candidates

approved for interviews with Anderson. It became a scuffle. Every now and then the State Department will have to make exceptions and let people have their way, rather than fight, because I think for Ron Spiers the idea was to try to minimize the fighting and defuse things, so he did, very well.

Q: Did George Shultz stay out of it?

USSERY: No, but he didn't micromanage it either. Who went to Russia and who went to Paris? Okay, he realized that the White House was going to have a friend of the President in Paris, but he sure wanted to be in the front end of that discussion. Who went to Beijing or Moscow, he viewed that as his to steer. And it was more of a case that sometimes George Shultz felt very strongly about certain individuals going to certain posts, and he'd sort of let it hang out there that if I don't get this one in Moscow, I may resign. Now who went to Buenos Aires — no, he never tried to say, “I'm picking the slate here.” In fact, Spiers really picked the slate. But every now and then, if he had one he wanted, then there was a no-further-discussion kind of approach from George Shultz.

Q: How did you find the White House side of things?

USSERY: Fascinating.

Q: Was there a change in attitude, because on one hand the feeling during the early part of the Reagan Administration, actually through a lot of the Reagan Administration, was that Ronald Reagan has certain very fixed ideas and he really set the tone, but then the rest of it was, you know, the White House had an awful lot of chiefs running around thinking they were in charge —

USSERY: But I'd look at that in two ways. One is, yes, the organization which starts from the President actually divided power between three people under him at the beginning of his administration, and that didn't work. It worked for a little while, and then —

Q: It was Deaver, Meese, and Baker.

USSERY: — then it broke apart. It was basically Deaver and Baker deciding that Meese wasn't up to their standards of performance and just booting him out, and then he became Attorney General. But I will say two things, I think, for the record about the Reagan Administration that I feel really strongly about, having analyzed it over a period of time. One was it was very easy to be a Reagan appointee. You understood every day what you were supposed to do. You understood every day when a new issue came up nobody had ever briefed you on before, you could figure out what Ronald Reagan and his Administration probably wanted you to do. So you could be down at a mid-level, and figure out how to carry out your job without having to throw a bunch of paper back up and say, “Anybody got any idea what we ought to do on this?” I thought that was one of the advantages, for conservatives or liberals, over somewhere in the middle where every issue gets sort of invented or reinvented from the first shot.

But the other was comparing secretaries of State. Having worked for three secretaries of State but having also worked very closely with Jim Baker in the Bush campaign, I was very impressed with George Shultz's stewardship. It was George Shultz himself who took the view that he really was delegating authority. And I thought that George Shultz had very powerful assistant secretaries of State. They became household names in Washington and good parts of America — Chet Crocker, Richard Burt, Elliott Abrams — they could act independently in their regions with minimal coordination with Shultz. When they traveled places, people talked about, oh, there may be big deals breaking and negotiations happening. I was disappointed in Secretary Baker because he took the view that he didn't want to delegate authority. The buck stopped with him, and consequently he could only focus and would only focus on five or six key issues, four or five at a time, and the rest of the world be damned. That's what I felt like. That's a harsh or maybe, certainly, unfair criticism, but I felt that the Shultz approach — the Reagan-Shultz approach, I should say, because Shultz made a nice complement and fit in very well in the Reagan management

style — gave us a global foreign policy that I thought gave appropriate focus to probably every area of the globe except for Central Africa. Southern Africa got a great amount of attention. Northern Africa got significant attention. So I was very impressed with the way George Shultz did delegate authority, and I don't think that generated confusion. No matter what system you put together, there are going to be some downsides, either with highly centralized or highly decentralized systems. But it led me to believe in delegating authority and giving up some control.

Q: I have to say that in my interviews — I've never dealt with a Secretary of State personally myself — George Shultz comes out by far probably the most impressive Secretary of State across the board. Kissinger, of course, had his great strengths, but also his significant weaknesses, and maybe next to the years of Acheson and George Marshall — and I'm not sure how much this is seen through rose-colored glasses, but they were also major secretaries of State, I think Shultz certainly fits in with them.

USSERY: Maybe he wasn't the master strategist, maybe he wasn't the most creative, and maybe he couldn't turn foreign policy on a dime, as maybe others might have been able to do; but for longevity, for plodding along and going across the finish line first, I'd give it to George Shultz..

Q: How about the White House? Were you running across Deaver saying, “This is my candidate,” and Baker saying, “No, this is my candidate”?

USSERY: Yes.

Q: Or not even these people but their subordinates were feeding names. There must have been an awful lot of politicking going on.

USSERY: Well, I think first of all, when we talk about Shultz and all, before we got to Shultz and before I was White House Liaison, you know there was a big tug-of-war going on between Haig and Dick Allen, between NSC and the State Department. When Bill

Clark became National Security Advisor and Shultz was Secretary of State, they really did a terrific job of reducing the friction between the NSC and the State Department. But actually, the White House did a very good job of coordinating itself, in terms of candidates. In other words, you never were in a conflict where Deaver had one guy and Jim Baker had another. They already hashed that out among themselves. They never let themselves be put at odds with each other. Bill Clark only occasionally got out on a limb for a candidate, only to find out that there were other forces against or other people in the White House who said, “No, no, Bill, we can't have that one.” But John Harrington tried to be very responsive to Bill Clark because he didn't ask for much, and when he asked he usually did have good candidates in mind. I was always impressed with the Reagan White House machinery in the first term, not so much with what I saw after Donald Regan left Treasury as Secretary and became chief of staff and changed the White House. But that first-term Reagan White House, despite anything, looking back, about what happened with the original triumvirate — which really shook down into Baker being n#mero uno and Deaver number two, allied very closely with Mrs. Reagan — I was always very impressed operationally, organizationally, with the first-term Reagan White House.

Q: Were you noticing Mrs. Reagan's influence coming in on candidates and this sort of thing?

USSERY: I did. I heard she'd . . . it came in some on participants on delegations, but it did come in some on candidates. And I was saying that usually when she had somebody that she wanted, they were usually bad and not qualified for the job. So some of the few skunks we ever had to deal with from the White House really originated with Mrs. Reagan. Mrs. Reagan not only didn't sit around and worry about how somebody's skills might match with the job, but she still carried a misunderstanding about what it took to be a late 20th-century diplomat and what skills you had to have besides social graces.

Q: Well, I think too, I've heard for example, there was a woman whose name I can't remember — she was married to a Spanish nobleman — and she wanted to be ambassador to Spain and was trying to unseat Tom Enders.

USSERY: That's right. There was some of that unsavory kind of

Q: And she was going to Nancy Reagan.

USSERY: That's right. That was happening. And the other was Helene von Damm, who was an interesting success story, an Austrian immigrant who had been Ronald Reagan's personal secretary for years, ended up as sort of a power-wielding head of Presidential personnel early in the first term and then ambassador to Austria. And I met with von Damm in Vienna one time, when I was on a trip over there for the government, and while I didn't have any personal experience that permits me to say whether or not she was well qualified to be ambassador or not, there were certainly a lot of criticisms of her from Foreign Service officers who served under her and from others who said she never really did a good job. And you know . . . the criticism seems sometimes to be based on the view that she was very arrogant based on her relationship with Mrs. Reagan and President Reagan. And others just said, no, she was out of her league and couldn't rise to the job. But she certainly went over there, went back to Austria and had a grand old time and viewed herself as what she was, a major player on the social scene as well. Now I think the other issue to allude to that this reminds me of is that the Reagan White House continued to perpetuate the terrible idea that Americans who were immigrants from certain countries or whose parents were immigrants from certain countries made fantastic ambassadors back to those countries.

Q: The answer is au contraire.

USSERY: Yes, exactly. And so it was Italian-Americans back to Italy, Arab-Americans back into the Arab World —

Q: Greek-Americans — you know, that whole thing.

USSERY: — and we had one celebrated case, I'd say, where in the same year two Arab-Americans were given two posts in the Gulf, and the embassies were turned upside-down by both of these people, and some State Department psychiatrist went out and in one case said, well, the problem in this one embassy is our ambassador's out there acting like an Arab pasha rather than acting like an American style of leadership and management. I worked with Ron Spiers on trying to dump the notion that it was great to send people back to countries of origin, and let's get down to who has the real skills and talents and get away from this sentimental thing that's supposed to be making a great hit. But that's also an issue that doesn't die easily. I know that one of my successors in Morocco is an American Jew, and the Moroccans couldn't stop being preoccupied with trying to figure out if it was some message from the Americans being sent by selecting a Jew. I even heard that unfortunately even today, 1998, I imagine that when we send women to the Arab World or we send a Jew to the Arab world, there's still somewhere in the process some discussion of, Gee, is this a good idea or not? And we all find that loathsome and hope it doesn't weigh heavily in the consideration, but I bet it still goes on.

Q: Well, looking at the history of American diplomacy, even in the 19th century we were sending immigrants back, you know, with the idea that isn't this great, they know the language. Usually it doesn't work for the very obvious reason that they're considered slightly to be deserters or traitors.

USSERY: The baggage they go with is that there's a built-in expectation on the host country's part that, oh, we're going to have a very sympathetic person. Then there's even a little bit of distrust quickly built among the foreign policy apparatus when somebody starts saying, you know, that Norway is the most neglected country on the planet, and now we've got to revise our Norway policy. And if you're Norwegian-American, people think, well, yes, this is what's behind it; he's pushing it, fairly or not. That makes a bad mix.

Q: On this, was there a burnout factor when you left in '85-

USSERY: No, I actually operated. . . . I came to Washington on the two-year plan, thought I'd go back to South Carolina. I went to the State Department for two years thinking I'd have this great experience and then return to politics. So after four years at State, I actually had a very concrete view that my best opportunities in the private sector would be while the Reagan Administration was still in office. Now the people would say, well, he came out of this great administration, and terrific . . . and so I thought the timing was right. And I couldn't imagine that if I stayed longer I could do more than what I'd already done. So to me it was just an easy decision. I could have imagined staying in the White House liaison job endlessly, seeing more of the world. And really, as I say, I'd built up some good IOU's from all the people I helped, even in some small way, but it didn't seem to make sense for me, since I believed in my heart of hearts that I wanted to finally break out into the private sector. I felt if I worked four more years, the longer I worked in government and the older I became, the tougher it was going to be to make the transition.

Q: I was wondering, before we move on, is it David Funderburk — you mentioned South Carolina —

USSERY: He's in North Carolina.

Q: Oh, well, they're all the same (laughter).

USSERY: I actually had a mission to Romania for the State Department in I think it was March of 1985, which was at the end of the worst winter Romania had had in 40 years. Things were really tough. Ceausescu wanted the electricity turned off at night at eight or nine o'clock. I went to the hotel, where they walked me to my room after dinner by candlelight. It was a bleak place. There were people lined up at markets to buy onions and beets. And I could go on and tell you about the world of difference today with American television and Pizza Huts and McDonald's in Romania. But I happened to go over there

at the time Funderburk was ambassador, and he also got into a lot of controversy as ambassador, and the morale at the embassy wasn't great. But he was a political heir to Senator Jesse Helms and had been appointed at that time. Yes, I remember Funderburk.

Q: So in '85 what happened?

USSERY: Okay, so in 1985 I was asked to represent the University of South Carolina in Washington. So I thought that off of that I'll build a consulting practice. And I left, I would say, in June of 1985, and by November of '85 I was back at the State Department.

Q: What happened?

USSERY: When I left, one of the jobs that had come open was deputy assistant secretary for North Africa congressional and media relations in the Near East and South Asian Affairs Bureau, because Tom Nassif, whom you know —

Q: -whom I just interviewed last month —

USSERY: Tom had just gone from deputy assistant secretary to become ambassador to Morocco. So we started trying to fill that, and this was a case where the White House sent over a handful of r#sum#s and said, “Anybody in this group will be fine.” And the State Department kept saying, “We don't like these people.” And it really got bogged down quickly to three candidates, one of them my friend Sean Randolph. And Sean finally got tired of being number three on the list and moved on. Then Bill was the White House candidate, and the State Department said, “No, the White House candidate, yes, he knows the Mideast inside out, he's spent his life in there, he's very scholarly, but he's known to be totally pro-Israel and this will never do.” And the State Department candidate was a guy that the White House said, “Oh, my God, this guy's not a conservative Republican, and he's just some Arabist that will upset the Israelis.” And they were at loggerheads for months and went nowhere on it. They searched some more. Each one found a couple of

other people who might be interested. The one that the White House didn't want was a Republican who worked for Senator Mathias in the Congress.

Q: Republican Mac Mathias.

USSERY: Yes, but you know, the White House said, “This isn't our kind of Republican.”

Q: No, Mac Mathias is known as a moderate Republican.

USSERY: And the White House said, “This is a plum spot. We'll be damned if we're going to give this up to just some run-of-the-mill Republican.” That's basically what we talked about earlier. So finally, I don't know exactly how it happened, but Anne Foreman, who was the head of the international agencies in Presidential personnel, was talking to Arnie Raphel, the principal deputy assistant secretary of the near east bureau, and in a conversation both discovered they liked me. And I became the perfect compromise candidate. I would have been on nobody's short list as the right guy for the job, because I had no Mideast experience — none whatsoever. I had the congressional and all the press experience they needed, but I wouldn't have even thought of myself for the job. But they both said, well, we'll go with Mike if you'll go with Mike, and so some time in the summer I got a call that said, “How would you like to be the deputy assistant secretary?” And I said, “Well, that's fantastic, but I never could imagine I could be this.” But they said, “No, we want you.” Anne, by the way, ended up becoming deputy secretary of the US Air Force under Bush. She was a great lady and still a friend and lives about 20 miles out in the country from me today, and her husband, Dennis Foreman. They were interesting people. They started off their careers as lawyers and worked for George H.W. Bush in his UN years and then Anne went into private law practice. Dennis became a career lawyer at the State Department. In 1988 Dennis wanted to quit State to help George Bush get elected. I got Dennis a job in the campaign. Out of the campaign he became deputy general counsel in the Treasury Department, and Anne became deputy secretary of the Air Force.

So it took about three months to reprocess my security papers, and in November of 1985, I was the deputy assistant secretary for North Africa congressional and press in Near East and South Asia.

Q: You held that job until when?

USSERY: Until I went to the Bush campaign in August of 1988.

Q: Okay. What did the job consist of?

USSERY: Well, 80 percent of the job was North African affairs.

Q: When you say North Africa, what do you mean?

USSERY: Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. And I was in the job a month when there were the tourist airport bombings in Rome and Vienna. And smoking guns pointed to Qadhafi in Libya, and we began a two-year confrontation against Libya. It was my first real what I call foreign policy or bilateral or regional job — I had done other nice things around the core of foreign policy for four years at the State Department — and I went in to see Arnie Raphel and we talked about, well, what are we going to do, how are we going to handle this Libyan crisis? And he says, “We're going to put together a 12-agency task force on Libya.” I said that sounds like a great idea because that's really going to be an all-engulfing kind of job, and all that. I didn't know anything about Libya, and I said, “But who are you going to get to chair it?” He said, “You're the DAS — you are.” And I said, “Me?” I don't really know anything yet about Libya. I've only been here a month.” He said, “Yes, but it's your job, and we're not going to give up control of Libya. You've got to become Mr. Libya.” I spent two years, I probably spent close to 90 percent of my time, on Libya, 10 percent on the rest of the Maghreb. But the job included congressional and press affairs for the entire region. At the time you had the Afghan War; you had things hot in Lebanon; you had the Iran-Iraq War, the Mideast Peace Process — it was fantastic to be involved in those issues every day. I loved it. And I became the chairman of a task

force to do a billion-dollar military arms sale through the Congress to Saudi Arabia. I also became involved, because of congressional interest in Afghanistan, in helping further the humanitarian supplies going to the Afghans. I once went on a cargo plane into Pakistan and back. So it was really terrific. In fact, most of the time I've spent in European capitals was during this job because of the need to coordinate with the West Europeans on Libya.

Q: Let's focus on Libya, and then we'll move to some of the other areas. In the first place, how did you come up to snuff on Libya?

USSERY: By immersion, by being thrown in the river and told to try to swim.

Q: How was Qadhafi seen at that time by us, and then what were some of the forces at play?

USSERY: Qadhafi was always seen as a little bit crazy and very much dangerous, very destabilizing, very threatening to Tunisia, to Egypt, to the Sudan, trying to build an elaborate terrorism network. Certainly, during that two-year period, the biggest criticisms we took, which I was comfortable with defending, were that we shouldn't have bombed him — and I certainly feel it was the right thing, the military attack in mid-April 1986 — and the other was that we were elevating him and making him more important than he was and deserved to be. Maybe, but sometimes my view is that if some guy's trying to hold a gun to you and trying to rob you on the street, it's tough to say, “Well, let's don't give this guy too much attention.” But to me it was, we were reacting to him, and out of necessity.

But the first big decision came in early January. The President made a nation-wide speech, and he made the tough decision not to respond militarily against Libya but to put in far-reaching economic sanctions, prohibitions against travel and business with Libya, and to try to block American subsidiaries in Europe from doing business in Libya, and to try to get the Europeans on board. So it was really quite a major undertaking. And my job

initially was to chair the emergency task force which tried economically and politically to isolate Libya to the extent possible.

Q: Did you find with the various departments and agencies involved, were there any ones that were sort of out of line, or were you pretty much united?

USSERY: I think actually there were some inside the State Department who weren't with the program initially, who felt this is excessive, the Europeans are never going to agree to all this, we're just causing ourselves more heartburn. Treasury was totally on board, through Under Secretary Bob Kimmitt, whom I knew from politics, about getting tough and blocking bank accounts in the US, Libyan funds. The CIA was on board. And the White House was gung ho, let's punish this guy. And the National Security Council, where I worked just a little bit with the soon-to-be-infamous Ollie North. And everybody was pretty tough on Libya, except probably the Defense Department. So I started learning one of the axioms of foreign policy that I hadn't understood before, which is everybody is hesitant when they have to use their assets. The Defense Department wanted us to use non-military assets and wasn't itching to take military action against Libya and were very quick to always tell us — as they should — the downsides to any potential military operation. But that played out some at my level. Ultimately, of course, it played out at the highest levels in the country.

Q: There were those two bosom buddies, Casper Weinberger and George Shultz.

USSERY: — and George Shultz, yes, those former Bechtel chiefs. I think Weinberger worked for Shultz at one time. Those guys had worked together for years and years in the Nixon Administration and could never quite get along in their new roles in Washington in two power centers, that's right.

Q: On the military side, in the first place, had the Berlin explosion happened, and the bombing?

USSERY: What happened was for three months we kept tightening the noose on Qadhafi and were pleased. Qadhafi responded by plotting four other terrorist activities, including the possible kidnapping of our ambassador in Rwanda, which we intercepted information on that and thwarted that before it ever —

Q: Who was that, do you remember?

USSERY: John Upton. But he did succeed in having a bomb planted in a Berlin disco, which killed a US serviceman and a Turkish woman. But that was after. What we finally built up the White House involved in pushing the military was in mid-March.

Q: Was this '86?

USSERY: '86. The US military finally took its ships across the line of the Gulf of Sidra.

Q: The "Line of Death."

USSERY: The Line of Death, which Qadhafi declared. Instead of the internationally accepted 13-mile limit on international waters, he drew a line which went across from the west to east of the Gulf of Sidra, and said, "Once you come in here, 13 miles doesn't apply — you're in Libyan waters." And very few would ever test it. Of course, there had been an incident in 1981 where some American pilots crossed the line and shot down two Libyan airplanes that went out to intercept them. So Cap Weinberger finally agreed to take some ships across the Gulf. And the interesting thing I saw was that when we acted — and maybe this, people say, is a lesson from Vietnam, and maybe it's the right lesson, but it was interesting to find out that for whatsoever we wanted to do, the Defense Department took the view, whatever we do, we do it with major overkill. We don't take one ship across; we've got a couple of aircraft carriers out there; we'll have other ships — we go big time. And so if something happens, we have plenty of assets in place. So actually, we had to wait for some assets to come from other oceans, things like that. So in mid-March they did it. Qadhafi was stupid enough to send out some boats and missiles, and we whacked

him back and knocked out everything that he threw at us, and in a day it was over. And we went on. So our critics — particularly some here and in West Europe — said, “Well, that's a lot of American chest-thumping, trying to make themselves feel big and roar at Qadhafi, but it doesn't really do anything. It doesn't hurt him inside Libyit helps him inside Libya.” And so then Qadhafi, after the Gulf of Sidra, launched the terrorist plans that he had going, and the bomb went off in the Berlin disco. Then President Reagan said, “Okay, now we're going to retaliate. Now we're going to attack Libya.”

Q: Prior to this attacking Libya, what were you getting from the Europeans, particularly the French, the Italians, and in a way the British?

USSERY: Actually, I was very pleased with the cooperation we were getting everywhere, except the Italians were a little concerned about what they might lose in the oil industry. And the French, we really had a nice little debate going with the French about. . . . And to sort of cut to the end of it, I really learned that economic sanctions don't work very well. They're a very clumsy instrument of foreign policy, but they're an excellent instrument of foreign policy if your only alternative is military action and you don't want to go into military action. They're porous; they're controversial; you know, there are a lot of things about economic sanctions that aren't great; they hurt our own companies — all this. But as an alternative to military action, if that's where you are, I think it can be a useful tool. I'd never want to have to be the implementer of economic sanctions again in my life, but I was surprisingly pleased at the progress we were making outside of France up until that time. Part of our effort was also to work with the intelligence community to find those trying to sneak in goods or trying to provide services surreptitiously from the West European side. There were companies that, independent of their governments, were trying to continue doing business with Libya; and we'd find out about particular violations and try to get these companies' own governments to intervene. Usually, we had excellent cooperation if we could provide information that what we were talking about was something of military potential. We found less cooperation in oil commerce. The President ordered all Americans out of Libya, the few hundred that were there, because

we didn't want anything to happen to them, we didn't want them to be taken hostage, didn't want them to be in the way if we had to exercise the military option. So anyway, I thought things were moving well, but I knew they'd never have a grand impact on Libya, except possibly over the long term, because you just can't squeeze out enough commercial ties and prevent somebody from finding alternative products on the market somewhere.

Q: Particularly when it's oil.

USSERY: Yes. Oil's fungible, and that's the way it goes. But anyway, I knew that we weren't heading towards destabilizing the r#gime. We were doing what we thought we had to do politically in the United States to be seen responding forcefully to terrorism and to try to, probably inside the Administration, vent our spleen and make ourselves feel good that we were getting tougher on Qadhafi.

Q: Well, there had to be thought, of course, about could you destabilize this guy. What was the consensus that came up?

USSERY: The CIA had been working on this a long time. I found that we had been providing training to Libyans outside of Libya. There had been an attempt to bring in expatriate Libyans through Tunisia in a failed raid that didn't work. And all that was very — to me, as I started to learn about black operations through this exercise — I was very unimpressed with our options and possibilities to destabilize or do anything effective inside Libya. Qadhafi had a very tight operation. We had very few Libyan sources of information, and fewer possibilities of inside cooperation. Unless we could create some kind of sea change, or change in the political dynamics inside Libya, we did not have reasonable hope of turning the Libyan military and others around Qadhafi against him.

Q: Not as a subversive thing, but did we see the natural tension between Egypt and Libya sometimes springing?

USSERY: The Egyptians really were probably more than us eager to try something to overthrow Qadhafi, and they couldn't stand him — the Tunisians as well — but we couldn't find a vehicle. I will explain later how I became involved in writing a covert plan to try to topple Qadhafi, something that leaked to the national media and became an issue inside the US, but that was in the summer a few months after the bombing raid on Tripoli and Benghazi. But up until the time when we started our military retaliation, we didn't have a realistic expectation of destabilizing Qadhafi.

Q: Did we see the Soviets as being much of a factor?

USSERY: We spent a lot of time thinking about the Soviet question. The Soviets were giving him a lot of military supplies, and again, when we talk about trying to tighten that economic noose, he had the Soviet alternatives. The Soviets could supply almost anything that the West pulled out. The biggest griping from the West Europeans was "He's just going to go buy it somewhere else. We're just depriving ourselves of a business opportunity. We're not hurting Qadhafi." But what we all were poring over and trying to analyze carefully was to what degree and how far did the Soviet Union go with this guy. And our prevailing view was the Soviets will probably not do more than public posturing as long as our actions seem to be falling short or aimed short of destabilizing Qadhafi or, let's say, of overthrowing the r#gime. At that point we were concerned that the Soviets would intervene, and there was the risk of a Mediterranean confrontation.

Q: Well, we come to the point where this bomb goes off. Were we pretty sure from the beginning where the source of the bomb was?

USSERY: We were pretty sure of the source being the Abu Nidal organization, and the issue became, was Abu Nidal acting on behest of Qadhafi with Libyan support, or more on behalf and with the support of the Syrians? And there were certainly journalists and critics in the United States who said we're going after the wrong guy, we ought to be going after the Syrians on this one. And the Syrians were hot behind the killing of 240 Marines

years before in Lebanon, and we hadn't done anything. When the Syrians did something, we didn't do anything; when poor little Libya gets behind something or may be behind something or gets a fingerprint on something, we try to turn it into a Libyan operation. I think what we felt sure about was that the Libyans had helped the Abu Nidal operation in the Rome and Vienna airport attacks. It was much clearer than a Syrian hand. But we never could say with 100 percent certainly that Qadhafi himself ordered or sanctioned the airport attacks. We could see Libyan operatives helping Abu Nidal, but they did that on an ongoing regular basis.

Q: How did it work out, though? I mean, at some point we became fixed on the idea that this Berlin bombing —

USSERY: Well, then, the Berlin bombing, though, was definitely a Qadhafi operation.

Q: Are you talking about the earlier ones, where —

USSERY: In January.

Q: — the airport ones, where you weren't sure?

USSERY: That's right, the airport ones where we weren't sure if Qadhafi himself personally ordered them or just had his intelligence network giving its ongoing support to the Abu Nidal terrorists. For the Berlin disco we intercepted messages from the Libyan Government to go ahead and bomb the facility.

Q: So this is apparent very quickly.

USSERY: Yes, very quickly.

Q: Well, then, how did the order come about, I mean from the President?

USSERY: No, the American public was surprised. There was a good cloak of secrecy around the decision to bomb Qadhafi. News broadcasts interrupted their early evening shows to announce that we were now in the process of bombing Tripoli. The media hadn't expected it. They had believed a possible attack could be decided in the next week or so, but might not be decided by the President. So it was a total success in terms of the element of surprise. The President worked with a close group inside the White House. I was told on the eve of the bombing to write a paper speculating what would happen if Qadhafi died, what would happen inside Libya. And by myself I wrote this paper, and I basically supported the idea that even if Qadhafi's lieutenants succeeded him, the Libyans' hostile foreign policy would change. You might have the same kind of political domestic politics, but you really would dramatically change the external politics and the possibility of moderation.

So that told me we were getting pretty serious about that, and only on the afternoon of the bombing was I told, be sure to stay late tonight, we're going to need to work late, which further alerted me that an attack was imminent. But that's how secret it was.

Q: It would seem that if you're going to attack Libya, there would be a need to figure out what would be the effect or the target. I mean, in other words, when you're targeting, you really should go beyond "is this brick or concrete, and what sort of weapons do we use?"

USSERY: That's right. There was a lot worked out between the Defense Department and. . . I'd reviewed military targeting list from back in January of that year. I'd seen a wide range of different kinds of targets and what we thought went on there, whether it was chemical or biological weapons being made in a pharmaceutical facility, where the small Libyan navy was, where their military command was, where Qadhafi's bunkers were. And the military and the NSC picked the targets and presented them to the President. I wasn't involved in targeting. When we did the Gulf of Sidra operation, I was in the Operations Center, and we were connected by audio with the military commander as he said, "Okay, now we're about to fire at a radar facility here." It was a sort of listening line to a war, and

messages going back and forth, and then he'd say, “The Libyans are sending out two airplanes now against this ship, and we're going to attack, then we're going to attack, send our missiles at this target.” I wasn't involved in the true military preparation; I was involved in the political and diplomatic, around the clock for four days straight, once we'd bombed Libya on April 15-16, and would go home for six or seven hours of sleep and come back and work all day and the evening as we tried to gain support around the world, defuse the issue in the United Nations, work with the American Congress and press — that was my role.

Q: What was the reaction from, say, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt?

USSERY: Their governments quickly expressed sympathy with the Libyan r#gime. They felt that we weren't going far enough to overthrow Qadhafi, and they'd be darned if they were going to be out there looking like they supported military action against Libya. They'd be on the revenge list. So we were very disappointed with their expressions of Arab unity and brotherhood against “our brother Muammar Qadhafi and the Libyan people.”

Q: Did you, I mean, can you, I mean, were we — ?

USSERY: We were upset, yes. I mean, I think one of the things that was consistent in the Reagan approach was, you know, you really undermine your own efforts when you start understanding your friends' dilemmas too much, and if you don't put heat on them, then don't expect anything more than you get. And so, in fact, I wrote the response that was supposed to go from the President to King Hassan, and Dick Murphy, the assistant secretary, called me in and said, “Boy, do you really want to send this message back rebuking King Hassan?” I said, “Yes, and I think that's what the White House wants. You know, they don't want us to sit back and write letters and say, 'well, gee, we understand you're in a tough position. I sure hope you can do better the next time'. We should criticize them and say, you know, you've really disappointed us and you've been telling us for years how terrible and destabilizing Qadhafi is for your region, and now we do this and you

publicly come out with this statement, even though we know they're going to come back and say to us, 'Oh, my God, you just don't understand us'."

I actually like that sort of foreign policy myself, you know. I sort of thought throughout the whole Cold War that the US gained tremendously by the Russian view that Ronald Reagan was this crazy guy capable of doing anything. The view is that he's not sophisticated, and my God, this guy might really be capable of pushing the nuclear button or pulling the trigger some day. I thought it served our interests very well. I thought it was great, instead of being seen as sensitive and sympathetic to the Arabs, to be seen as these tough bastards in Washington who see things in a black-white world and don't understand the gray.

And Dick Murphy said to me, "Well, this is the toughest message I've ever seen in my 30-something year career to an Arab leader," which was, in his view . . . he wasn't happy with what I drafted. But I finally convinced him that he didn't want to be sending over something soft or willy-nilly to this red-meat-chomping White House. And Tom Nassif received the message and later told me he wouldn't give the written version to the king of Morocco because he thought he might be thrown out of the kingdom. Instead he rephrased it himself anyway and gave a watered down version of it. And so, hell, that's how foreign policy works sometimes. And then the king still said to him, "But, my God, you don't understand the predicament I'm in." As I say, I prefer to have them tell us we don't understand then and worry that we're peeved the next time they have to come out publicly.

Q: Were there problems with the American public?

USSERY: Well, there was some problem after the Gulf of Sidra, but mostly broad support. This is just a provocation, and of all times, now that you're in with Qadhafi, why do you have to send ships now to do what we profess was just a routing testing? And the view was, look, if you don't challenge the right to cross that line, then over time, you allow his

claim to stand. And of course, they were like, “This is a provocation, now's the worst time, you could have waited a year to test this, “bla-bla-bla. Of course, there was truth to that.

But when we bombed Tripoli and Benghazi on April 15, there was great American public support for the military attack on Libya and surprisingly good public support in Europe, maybe more than I had imagined, though the governments there were more critical — except our allies the Brits. You know, the governments felt we were being the reckless Rambo Americans, and Ronald Reagan was being a Rambo cowboy maverick leader again. But the people in Europe were very supportive, and that quickly tempered the support of the governments in Europe, and they saw that we were having success, and it had certainly thrown Qadhafi and his r#gime into turmoil, something of a tizzy, and so the reaction came around.

Support in Congress was very strong, and I remember I was called and told, “Look, Senator Kennedy needs somebody to go up and brief him right now on why we've attacked Libya.” And I went, “Oh, God, well, Ted Kennedy, liberal Democrat, he doesn't like that we'd gone out there and done this macho foreign policy, and I've got to go up there and take the heat.” So I went up there. I saw a group of other senators who were very supportive, applauded President Reagan for attacking Libya. I said, “Well, I've got to go in and see Senator Kennedy.” And Kennedy said, “Look, I'm about to go take off on a flight to Boston. I've got to know what to say when the reporters meet me at the bottom of the airplane in three hours. Tell me.” And he couldn't have been more supportive. He said, “This is great. I just need to know what's behind it.” I said, “Well, he's about to launch more terrorist attacks. Here's what was going on.” And I said, “And we even found out he had a terrorist plan to kidnap our ambassador in Rwanda.” And Kennedy paused, looked at me, looked around the room (and there was only Kennedy and I in the room), and he said in his famous Boston Kennedy accent with a little bit of stuttering, “W-well, where's Rwanda now?” And I could tell, of course, he had no idea where the hell Rwanda was. This was between the horrendous genocide in the '70's and what would happen a few years later when we'd all know where Rwanda was, or is. And so I, being the diplomat I think I was

becoming, said, “Yes, that's right, Senator, in Central Africa.” He said, “Yes, yes, that's what I thought.”

And so anyway, the support in the US was great. It gave a big boost in the polls to Reagan, but that wasn't the objective. And all the predictions of grand support for Qadhafi inside Libya and of tremendous support for the Arab World for Libya really didn't come true.

Q: Were you running across something, as I've had my Foreign Service career and afterwards, one of the great, I think, myths is, “Well, if you do this, they'll be Arab mobs in the streets in all the capitals,” and I've watched these Arabist experts — some of the people whom I've interviewed and know well — and they still talk about these mobs.

USSERY: That's right, and that was the case back then. And of course, there I was, new to the Arab World, and my instincts told me that this doesn't make sense. Nobody likes this guy. And there was a case where, you know, I said, Listen to your gut. I mean, not that it was my decision, but I was in there having to advocate and lobby what our course of action should be and actually I was for more military action from the get-go, from January, than most people and was definitely supporting military action. And my gut said, This is not true; it doesn't make sense. Why would all these people come out? Why would these governments hurt their relationship with the US for what we do in response to being attacked by Qadhafi? And it turned out, you know, even when I tried in my usual manner to reach out over those months to people who were experts on Libya in the United States — at Harvard, at Columbia, other places — and tried to get a view outside of just the US Government view of Libya and understand it, learn — you asked, how did I learn? By immersion, but that was part of it; I'd read what I could, I'd reach out to people, and people who totally disagreed with our policy, from January — I still felt I want to go for a lot of communication — and they always predicted to me, “It'll be a disaster if you ever attack this guy militarily, and it will be throughout the Arab World.” And after our military strikes in April, these people, some of them, were calling me and saying, “Well, you know, I tell you

what, I'm really surprised. I never would have believed that it would have looked like this or that you would have had this reaction." And so that was gratifying.

Q: Well, I think this probably is a good time to cut. And I'll put where we want to talk. We've been talking about the bombing of Libya and the immediate aftermath, but let's talk for the longer term, what happened, any developments internally in Libya and responses from there as seen from your perspective in the DAS job up to '88, and then also we want to talk about the developments during this time, when we move away from Libya, in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, and also did you get involved in the PLO, Palestinian Affairs?

USSERY: Not really, more involved in Morocco, so I think what I hope we do cover then is a little more about the South Asia and the Maghreb in general, and in fact, I used to say I worked more on the wings. I didn't work as much then on the Mideast Peace Process other than trying to get the Maghrebis behind our position. I worked more on bilaterals there and more on the Afghan War, and then we'll talk about how in the summer I found myself involved in a national controversy over the plan to try to overthrow Qadhafi. That will probably cover my NEA experience very well.

Q: We'll pick that up then.

USSERY: Good. Thanks.

Q: Today is the 19th of January, 1999. Mike, where are we?

USSERY: Well, I think we were just going to finish up on Libya, to sort of wrap things up pretty well to cover the NEA period before I then went off and resigned from the State Department for the second time for the Bush campaign and then went out to Morocco.

Q: Okay, then there were some other elements you were dealing with in the NEA?

USSERY: That's right. I was doing bilateral relations on Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria as well as Libya. And in the Maghreb, other than the Libya issue itself, as I think back on

it, it was a very nice quiet period all the way through to when I left in the summer of '88. I helped out South Asian issues, particularly with the Congress and the media, which was principally at that time the Afghan War, not as much on India and Sri Lanka. And so it was a very interesting time, and you know, also, as I just alluded to, assisting in terms of North Africa on the Mideast Peace Process in Lebanon, which was interesting. It was just a fascinating time to be inside the Department.

Q: By the time you left in '88, what was our reading on the Afghan War?

USSERY: That's a good question. When I left in '88, as I recall, things were still very hot in the Afghan War, but I believe, if my memory serves me, we felt we'd turned the tide, that the rebels were moving well against Soviet positions, and that things were going pretty well. But they were never going well enough to suit the Congress, and the Congress had really adopted a real passion for being really immersed in the Afghan conflict. But I don't really recall any more pivotal moments than that, Stu.

Q: You say that Congress had developed a passion for this. Was this coming out of the Republican side or the Democratic side or was it hard-liners?

USSERY: I thought there was a lot of interest on both sides, but the conservative Republicans had really adopted the Afghan rebels. And I took over a Congressional staff delegation, which was largely Republican staffers and Congressman Charlie Wilson, who became sort of the patron saint of the Afghan rebels and the Pakistanis, and it was a great trip over there. And we went out to the refugee camps and bringing back 20-something wounded Afghans, including a young child who had his arms almost blown off by a booby-trapped toy. The Republicans up on the Hill were prepared to really like military conflict if they had the opportunity. What was interesting on the trip is we really were visiting some of the rebels that we were supporting, who of course, were grand fundamentalists who these days would spit on us if they were given the opportunity.

Q: Basically the Taliban.

USSERY: The Taliban. We went to see some of their leaders, and walking through the armed camps, and Kalashnikovs, you get to meet these guys who wanted any help we could give them at the time, and today have great disdain for the United States. But it's an interesting little lesson for me.

Q: Was there any disquiet among anybody who was dealing with this about who these people were we were supporting and whither Afghanistan after the war?

USSERY: Well, I remember my counterparts inside NEA and others. They were not fooled by where this was all coming out, you know. They all knew this was a large inconvenience at the time. I thought some of the people on the Hill didn't see as well as some of the people in the Department where the inevitable was going to be. I thought people in the State Department, they understood, you know, over time this . . . maybe, they said, we can have a moderating or tempering effect on their behavior and their relations with the United States, but they always said “maybe.”

Q: Now you're on the other side. You'd been on the staff. And to be with a group of staff people, particularly coming out of the congressmen who were particularly interested in the Afghan War, what was your impression of the staff at that time? Were they knowledgeable? Were they true believers? Were they going farther maybe than their principals were going?

USSERY: I'd say yes to all three. Yes, I thought they were knowledgeable, and they were eager to match their knowledge up against the knowledge in the Administration. Of course, it was supposed to be collegial — we're talking mostly Republican staffers in a Republican Administration — but particularly up against the Foreign Service, to show that their hard-line positions were backed by knowledge. Yes, they were true believers. This was the great anti-Soviet showdown for them, as well as liberating some good

people and cementing a level of stability in South Asia. And finally, sure, the staffers often were leading the members, though in the case of Charlie Wilson, who you know would slip across the border of Pakistan and march around with the mujahideen as they were on maneuvers and come under fire. I mean, it was really quite a spectacle. I didn't see it myself, but to read the reports of a member of Congress traveling with the rebels in camouflage was something it would be hard to say his staffers were out ahead of him.

Q: You were mentioning also besides Afghanistan, the Middle East Peace Process. What was it, mainly a matter of making sure that the Arab countries were informed of what was going on?

USSERY: I think in some ways it was an effort to really try to move the Palestinians through the moderate Arabs, and it was a constant up and down to do that. Certainly we weren't on the Arab side trying to moderate or affect the Israeli position very greatly. We were trying to affect the Arab position.

Q: Well, then, in '88, you resigned in order to work on the Bush campaign?

USSERY: That's right. In 1988, as you recall, Governor Dukakis was ahead of George Bush by 17 points in the polls in June. It looked like my days as a political appointee were very fast coming to an end. One of my best friends and my college roommate, who'd been a friend from high school, Lee Atwater, was manager of the Bush campaign. And so in early July, while the Democrats held their convention and there was very little to be done during those few days while the media attention was on the Democrats, my wife and I went out with Lee and his wife to Luray, out in the Virginia countryside, for a nice little weekend getaway. While we were out there, I said to Lee, “If we're in an Alamo kind of situation, to mix metaphors, I'd rather be over there and at least go down with the ship and help you as best I can rather than sit around at the State Department and watch everything explode.” He said, “Come on into our office.” Jim Baker was about to leave as Secretary of the Treasury to become general manager. And so I went over as

the Republican Convention began, in the first week in August, which was great, because we had five offices at the end of the hall. One was Baker's, one was Atwater's, one was George Bush, Jr.'s, one was mine and Ed Rogers' (we shared ours together), and one was chief of staff to Baker, Margaret Tutwiler. So it was a real treat, and by that time Bush was back up neck and neck in the polls, and of course went on to blow out Dukakis in the general election. But during that time, in late September, early October, I was called by friends of mine in Presidential personnel who said Morocco's coming open because the career diplomat, whom I'd helped in preparing for his Senate testimony, Harry Bergold, was not going to be approved by the US Senate. Harry Bergold had been ambassador in Hungary and Nicaragua. Being ambassador in Nicaragua during the Reagan years was ripe for not keeping friends on the Hill. That was one of the three or four toughest foreign policy disputes going on, and Iran-Contra had happened. Harry wasn't swept up in Iran-Contra per se, but of course you couldn't satisfy the conservative Republicans enough with his conduct as ambassador in Nicaragua. There were accusations against him that he'd been spending his time in Nicaragua writing a book about his experiences as ambassador to Hungary. He was a political-military expert, and I think had also been in Portugal, or had been involved in Portugal somehow, I forget. I don't think he was ambassador. We'll check. And George Shultz wanted him to be ambassador to Morocco in spring of '88, and one of the last things I did was try to help in the briefing process with Harry for the Senate, and then he was shot down. So the previous ambassador, Tom Nassif, had been out of post by about nine months at that point in time.

Q: For the record, I've interviewed him.

USSERY: And Tom was my predecessor as deputy assistant secretary in the NEA bureau, then went to become my predecessor as ambassador. And yes, as I mentioned, I called Tom the first week in January to wish him happy New Year, and he was telling me about our oral history endeavors. But the Moroccans said, “Please, we can not wait until the Bush administration takes office, decides who they'll appoint and then goes through a process. We could end up for a year and a half with no ambassador, and we're a great

friend of America — please, President Reagan, appoint somebody now and don't wait for Bush." So Mike Deaver, deputy chief of staff, took this to Ronald Reagan and said, "What do you want to do, Mr. President." And the President said, "Let's go ahead and appoint somebody now with two caveats: they must already know something about Morocco and, second, they must be totally okay with George Bush." So by leaving the State Department, I found myself in the right place at the right time — as the ex-deputy assistant secretary for things Moroccan sitting in the Bush campaign. So when they asked me if I'd be interested, I said, "My gosh, I'd be honored, this would be great." And they said, "Of course, what will happen is somebody from the Foreign Service will be nominated, we'll take your name forward, and the committee will then make a decision and recommend to President Reagan who to appoint." And my view was, well, I'm too young, there was a very senior ex-ambassador in the Foreign Service, whom you may know, Lannon Walker, was to be nominated as the Foreign Service diplomat for the post. In my mind I imagined, well, Walker will get the nod, and that's fine. But I told my friends in Presidential personnel, I said, "That's great, it will be great to have the honor of being considered." And certainly, I imagined that will make an impression on Jim Baker, who everybody expects to be the next Secretary of State and will soon be deciding my role inside the State Department. And to my surprise, in a meeting with Colin Powell and Mike Deaver and others, I got the nod, and they called me, and I could have fallen out of my seat at that point in time. And they said, "We have one problem." They said, "It's a lot to do to have somebody go out in three months, because Congress will not be in session. We looked at this, and there are you and three others" — somebody I think for India, Denmark, and Israel — "We're going to have four people, and they're going to be recess appointments — appointments by the President when Congress is out. We're getting in high gear. There are security clearance updates all have to be done."

Let me back up, Stu, and just mention, I don't think we really covered this controversy about Qadhafi and the famous disinformation plan and everything.

Q: I don't recall that, and I also want to cover before we move on to the ambassadorship, what you did during the campaign.

USSERY: Okay. All right, good. Anyway, after the bombing of Qadhafi —

Q: This was in April —

USSERY: April of '86.

Q: After the Berlin bomb and all that.

USSERY: Yes. Going back to that, Qadhafi himself narrowly escaped being bombed, as I think I've addressed before, which, of course, I came to learn was the true intention. Always deny it and —

Q: Go after the command center.

USSERY: The great anecdote, if I didn't say it in my last session, was that when the bombing started I received a huge packet of questions and answers for the media that the White House was going to use to prepare the spokesmen and all that. One of the questions was, in the event that Qadhafi died during the raid . . . and so the answer was to be, “Well, he wasn't a planned target; it just was a fortuitous event.” That was press guidance written by Oliver North. And of course, that was a real botch, because the fact of the press guide itself became public information, and became part of the proof that, of course, we really were targeting Qadhafi. But Qadhafi really was in trouble. He went out of sight, and for about four months he made no public appearance in Libya. He was on the run; he was considered to be off-balance, just psychologically in a funk over the raid. And we managed to commit a great gaffe, a great overreach. I learned something about overreach in foreign policy through this experience because, really, everything on the surface said, one good push and this guy's out of there; he can be toppled. And we knew we didn't have the resources to do it. We weren't prepared to go bombing again, that we

needed — that we analyzed, and that was part of the analysis, that the real way to topple this guy was from a coup internally of those around him, that it wasn't going to be outside dissidents or others who came in and took over. Well, we'd be delighted, and felt like even if internally Libya maintained very similar policies through a Qadhafi successor around him, that the external dimension of foreign policy of this little country, causing ferment around the world and sponsoring terrorism, could end abruptly. So in true Reagan fashion, we managed to do things out of the normal circles and channels, and instead of tasking the CIA to write a plan to do this, a tightly held group led by the NSC tasked me and my staff to give them their best ideas, to write a draft plan that they would then in turn vet what they liked with the CIA. Well, I turned to my Libya Desk officer, Roger Dankert, and told him, “Here's the objective. Of course we're not going to support an effort to assassinate Qadhafi,” bla-bla-bla, “But we are going to do whatever we can covertly.” Well, it was really a stupid tasking for the State Department to be in the business of doing a covert plan, but we were getting pretty good at that in Nicaragua, Afghanistan — more and more the State Department was being drawn into the covert side of foreign policy. And Roger said he wouldn't do it. Ethically, based on his religious convictions and other things, he said that he could not be part of a plan that could lead to the death of a foreign leader. So I said, “Fine, I can respect that, but we've got the tasking, and I believe we have an opportunity. I'll write the plan.” So I wrote the plan — about a six-, eight-page plan — to cause trouble, keep Qadhafi further off balance, have his entourage and guards around him worried about future intervention by the US Government and others, trying to bring everything to a head, which hopefully would lead to a coup d'#tat. In it, I wrote a section about putting disinformation into Libya about US intentions and using even possibly leaking things erroneous through certain foreign media channels.

I wrote the plan, and I had moral compunction against trying to topple Qadhafi at almost any price, and so I sent it to Howard Teicher and Dennis Ross at the National Security Council. Now Dennis, of course, as we know, more than 12 years later is still very central in the Mideast Peace Process and really one of the architects of the Mideast

Peace Process. They loved it. Howard decided that he would rewrite it, just edit it really; but one of the edits was Howard didn't think and didn't understand the idea of the disinformation messages that we'd bombard into Libya. He added a phrase in there that was disinformation “including through the American media,” including like planting stories in The Wall Street Journal or something like that. And Arnie Raphel, who was the principal deputy assistant secretary in the Near East Bureau and later ambassador to Pakistan, who was killed in the airplane explosion and crash when he was with President Zia in Pakistan, Arnie also had gone over my plan before we sent it to NSC, agreed with it; but Arnie and I never saw the revised version that Howard Teicher did. They didn't send it back to us, didn't think it was necessary, only to say, “Good job, we'll take it from here, and we'll put together a committee, a planning operational group with the CIA, Defense, and others and take this a step further.” Well, somebody in there, of course, appalled by this idea of disinformation in the American media, leaked the plan, and it became an overnight front-page controversy: that the US Government was planning — though it never had approved the plan and that was never the original intention of the plan — it was easily cast that the US Government, the Reagan Administration, was planning to lie to the American media and use them as a foreign policy tool to try to overthrow Qadhafi. And at that point it was almost pointless, it was such a . . . any efforts we made to try to say, no, this wasn't what was intended, this wasn't what happened, were ineffectual. We're talking about reporters who'd seen this in black and white in a draft version, and we were under a landslide. And I felt for myself and those of us who were a party to it — we were probably going to have our heads lopped off and become the expendable ones from the administration. William Safire wrote an article on it, and he mentioned Raphel and me, and he said, you know, he used the phrase, “These guys aren't cowboys who would irresponsibly do this.” But the White House, basically, supported the effort. They supported the thrust of the plan while making the fine distinction that they'd never agreed to promote disinformation. But the White House really stood by everybody. And certainly I didn't think my loyalty could be greater to President Reagan, but it certainly was after . . . because there were certainly plenty of other politicians who would have been glad to throw us to the wolves and take

the easy way out and say, “These guys don't speak for me.” Instead, they said, “Nope, we're at war with Qadhafi and. . . . “Anyway, as so many of these things go, after about two weeks of being beaten up in the press, the issue moved on. But the real consequence of all of it was that it stopped all progress against Qadhafi. It totally boomeranged on us. Qadhafi came out and started making public speeches, going out in public, standing up I think in part to say — that was not only the natural reaction against this kind of plan — “Look at these Americans and what they were going to do to try to hurt our poor little country.” He realized that we were playing a bluff game to a large extent and that he could come out. He wasn't about to get zapped by F-16's or 15's or anything, F-6 fighters. And in effect, at that moment, the real momentum of the campaign against Qadhafi came to a screeching halt, in August of '86.

Q: Now to move back — and we'll come to this, again — what were you doing during the Bush campaign?

USSERY: I was one of the three real professionals in the office of the campaign manager, Lee Atwater. We were really assistants to the campaign manager, advisers to the campaign manager directly, though also meeting with George Bush, Jr., and Jim Baker and, you know, coordinating things. Our official titles were “senior advisors.” I was one of 20 senior advisors to the campaign. Some were actually outside the campaign, consultants, some of us were inside the campaign. And we did a lot of coordination through daily and weekly meetings, what was going to happen that day, the next day, gave our best ideas to the campaign manager, and tried to organize certain different sectors or organizations, groups. I was trying to help with the outreach to the unions, the outreach to Jews, the outreach to law enforcement, for example, trying to coordinate, organize those groups behind the Bush effort.

We were in the office from six in the morning to about eight at night. Usually some time about 30 minutes to an hour and a half after all the evening news shows were over (which seemed to be our scorecard — what happened on the evening news) and preparing for

what we knew the stories to be coming in the morning papers, we'd go home. But really, it was a great job, the kind of job a lot of people would love to have, to be at campaign center, one part of it — the other part, to be getting paid to give your opinions and advice mostly and talking on the telephone, or editing speeches. I never wrote a speech. I got to edit the work, the seventh draft, of a lot of others' speeches, and it was nice to sit on that end of the process and just be sort of a final filter.

Q: While you were there, where did you feel — not you only, but sort of the staff — was the crucial point of the campaign? Where did you feel the turnaround came?

USSERY: I think, really, the turnaround was coming over the summer, but once Dukakis came out of his convention in early July, he was strong. He was on top of the world. He looked like the next winner. By mid-August, by the end of the Republican Convention, things had really turned around. It was incredible. And a lot of that, it really hinged more on the conventions than we'll probably see again for a long time or we'll only rarely see. I mean, what Bush did was, in a 55-minute speech — which is often referred to as the “Points of Light” speech or the “Kinder, Gentler Nation” convention acceptance speech — and in that 55 minutes of that speech drafted by Peggy Noonan, he made himself acceptable. At that point, for a large percentage of the American voters, they were looking for Bush to show them something, a little oomph, a little something different than just being a guy carrying Ronald Reagan's jockstrap. And he really probably did as big an overnight turnaround as we're going to see — short of something revolving around a scandal — by that acceptance speech. And then he just went on to clobber Dukakis by continually defining Dukakis — you know, as a liberal out there on the far edge — and I think because of the Dukakis campaign, you probably won't see a candidate let his opponent define him and sit back quietly like that again. In the end it became a bloody boxing match that should have been called in the 8th round. We marveled in that campaign at how Dukakis took their whole strategic view until near the end, that they didn't need to respond to what they saw as inaccurate accusations by the Bush camp.

Q: Were you concerned about this Libyan disinformation thing as sort of a floating mine as far as your nomination went?

USSERY: When I thought about my nomination, I think it was the only thing I was concerned about at all, because I felt that I was stuck to that issue, and those who — if anybody — cared about that issue viewed that I was part of the idea to do disinformation to the American media. But I never heard a peep from the Congress. What happened was they rushed me out, and I arrived in Morocco on January 6th as a recess appointment. The Senate was very unhappy about these recess appointments and told George Bush they were unhappy about Ronald Reagan's recess appointments. Bush decided not to keep two of the four of us as his ambassadors to these posts —

Q: Who were they?

USSERY: I can't remember their names. I used to know. It escapes me now. . . . And decided to put forward me and one other to the Senate. So I actually, ironically (a great irony, actually), about nine months after I was at post, I finally had a Senate hearing. So the Senate wanted to at least say, “Okay, if he's out there, he's out there with our blessing.” And they were very concerned about the precedent of too many recess appointments in the future occurring. And so I continued to function fully. I just came in for that. But why I say “great” irony is that I had my hearing, which was so easy — very simple, piece-of-cake kind of hearing; they were satisfied, happy with what I was doing as ambassador, no past issues. Actually the other issue I was concerned about in terms of hearing was “Have you always been so close to Lee Atwater?” who was an anathema to the Democrats, and at that time, he was the chairman of the Republican National Committee. So I thought that if somebody wanted to take a swipe at Lee Atwater, they'd do it by blocking his friends. But nobody did. I had my hearing on a Wednesday, and on Saturday, October 7th, I was confirmed unanimously by the Senate. But it also happened to be the day my son was born. And so I was at the hospital, and I received a message that the Moroccan Desk officer had a call in to me. I called late that afternoon from the

hospital, and he said, “Congratulations.” And I said, “Well, thank you, it's really exciting. We've named him Greg, and he and Betsy are doing really well.” And he said, “What? You've got a baby?” And I said, “Yes, actually he arrived three weeks early.”

But anyway, I said to the Desk officer, “Well, anyway, that's what's happening, but then why did you say congratulations if you didn't know about Greg being born?” and he said, “Well, because you were confirmed by the Senate this morning.” I didn't know the Senate was in session on that Saturday, but they were, over budget issues as well. So that's getting, as I say, nine months into the process.

I went out on the 6th of January. As I went out, I was told “here's the problem. Here's the new problem. We've run this race track. We've got you going out there, but you actually have to present your credentials before Ronald Reagan leaves office on the 20th of January.” And they said, “Frankly, we don't know legally what happens if you are received after the 20th because this is a sort of gray area we haven't been into legally or constitutionally before. We're worried that it can be argued that your credentials evaporate after George Bush has been sworn in, even though George Bush likes you and all that.” So the problem is the king of Morocco only had credential ceremonies about twice a year. You know, he just didn't drop what he was doing to receive ambassadors. Of course, we were worried that if we tried to explain this to the king, he may say, “Well, wait a minute, do you mean that this isn't George Bush's guy and maybe if I don't receive him I'll get somebody different? Or maybe I'd rather have somebody different, somebody appointed by George Bush. And now I'm supposed to go rush and create a ceremony and receive this person.”

But they said, “Great, come on in.” And on the 11th of January, I was received in Marrakech by the king. Four other ambassadors, who had been in Morocco for months waiting to see the king, from other countries, were able to go in on my coattails. I took a morning suit out there for the ceremony. And so I went in to see the king and presented my credentials. I'd been out there and seen the king before as deputy assistant secretary,

but he wouldn't have remembered me. But I sat there, and I was talking to the King, and I've played golf a few times in my life. The king seemed to be preoccupied with acting on the misinformation that I was a golfer with a two handicap. And the king himself had a two handicap or better at one time and played golf virtually daily. And the king was so excited, and I'm trying to talk about all the great things we're going to do together bilaterally, and he was telling me — you know I'm sitting there trying to figure out how to correct a king that I don't even know how to play golf, really; I've never broken 100 — and he thinks, he's been told I can shoot a 74. So he said, “Oh, well we'll have to play golf.” I said, “Well, thank you, Your Majesty. That would be great, but Vice-President Quayle, who will be sworn in next week, he's the one you should be playing with. He's the one who's the real scratch golfer, and you should be playing with our vice president. But I'd be glad to play with others here, knowing you've got beautiful golf courses We're going to set up to play with the Vice-President. And he said, “Great.” So out of that they decided to test me. And the minister of the interior promptly called up to invite me out to play golf.

And after a round with the minister of the interior and his entourage of 30-something hackneyed little minions that followed him around clapping at his mediocre shots, the rumor was finally squelched back at the palace about my golf game, and I was never invited to play with the king.

Anyway, so I got there in time for the Bush inaugural. The other thing I would just bring up from that starting point — besides the excitement for my wife and me to go out — she was running the Head Start Program for the States at the time and had just been written up in The New Republic Magazine as one of the potential rising new stars for the Bush Administration. People thought she'd probably be an assistant secretary for Health and Human Services. Right after I got that call from the White House, I started talking to Betsy about it, and I said, “Look, I'm sure we do have the option. We both could stay here in Washington and have great new jobs in the Bush Administration, and people expect that you'll go from Reagan to Bush, and if you want to do that.. . . .” And she's the one who said, “No, the opportunity to go out and live abroad in an interesting country, for you to

serve as ambassador, no, that's clearly the right decision." So we went out there with stars in our eyes, very excited about everything. She'd been with me on one trip to Morocco before. She knew it was a lovely place. But then we got into all the things we didn't expect. We knew the Residence was a beautiful place to live, a big California-style with huge, 18-foot ceilings, terrific garden and pool. But we didn't know that all the country team and their spouses were going to be greeting us at the airport. We had no idea. The DCM said, "Well, I'll meet you at the airport, whip you through customs — you won't even have to go through customs" — and I didn't know. We came off sort of bleary-eyed and tired from an overnight flight on Royal Air Maroc from New York, and all these people greeting us all smiles and bubbly, and we were trying to be our perky best. But as we were at the airport — probably only five minutes — and then they came up and said, "Well, do you want to drive to Rabat," which is a little over an hour, an hour and fifteen minutes away in a speeding car, "or do you want to fly back on the US military plane the embassy has?" They asked me this, and I said, "Well, no, I'm happy to drive. I don't know about the US military plane." The defense attach#'s trying impress me with this plane and the early butter-up. But the DCM says, "Look, we know you're tired, and we want to just show you some things today, get you in the Residence. We've got a nice quiet dinner for you planned tonight at the home of the CLO. But we've got one thing we need to meet with you on urgently. Can we do a meeting urgently back at the embassy?" And I said, "Well, of course." And he said, "We'll brief you when we get there."

So we go to the embassy, the administrative officer, some people from security were there, from the defense attach# and their office are there, and the DCM, John Hawes, who was about to move on, transfer out to his next assignment, was there. And they said to me, "On Friday, we had a young navy officer in the military attach# office who was sent down Friday to check out the airport for your arrival. It was a drizzling night, and as he was going down there, six Moroccans were standing in the road smoking a cigarette, and he ran them off and ran them over. Three died, two others are in the hospital expecting to be released, and one is permanently disabled, maybe paralyzed." And he said, "So

what do you want us to do." Well, it sort of really hit me between the eyes. Because of the rush and everything, I never was able to go to the charm school, or whatever they call it, the Ambassadorial Training Program. I had the advantage of knowing more than almost any political appointee about what an ambassador does — I was not new to it. I had seen it. Working inside the Department was a great advantage. But nobody had ever told me about what you do when somebody runs over locals. And in fact, the whole area — I went out there with my ideas about how to move the bilateral relationship, what was important. I felt that I went out there with my bilateral agenda. But nobody prepared me that in a place where 800 employees and Peace Corps volunteers are running around, about all the personal side of management issues — which I found really could be fascinating and were the part I grappled with the most.

In this case, you know, it even got down to trying to understand, because he'd gone really on a mission — I mean, I don't know how you check out a commercial airport, other than meet with a few officials about my arrival — it was after hours; he was in a government car, not his own personal car; probably speeding, or at least speeding for conditions. But then he'd got Moroccans standing in a highway. It threw some great issue at me, and I had no experience about what countries do or what happens in a situation like this. And I said, "Well, what do the Moroccans say? That's what I need to know now." And I had my suspicions that the military attach# was trying to present a picture of a guy on mission, where he probably was just driving a government car without any mission off- hours. And the Moroccans said that maybe it would be good for him to leave the country for a few weeks, but they were not demanding that he be interrogated, they were not demanding any action against him and punitive damages, and they did not require that he leave the country permanently. He went away for a few weeks, and that was what the military attach# wanted. Some others on the team said, no, it's going to be better to get him out of here and never come back. It was interesting, about a year later, this young officer actually had a breakdown in Morocco, and he always on the surface looked like he was coping well, but really he wasn't and finally himself requested a permanent transfer.

But I found one of the most fascinating parts of the job being the personal issues. The AID officer who got drunk and rolled his Mercedes a couple of times right in front of the palace one night, though he got away without being tested on the alcohol part. Or the other AID officer who was getting a divorce, but under pressure from the Moroccan family of his girlfriend, got married in Morocco before he was divorced in the United States. And as I explained to him — he was a very talented officer — we couldn't tolerate bigamy in Morocco, and in effect — the idiot — his wife in the United States heard about it and made a big legal issue out of it and pressed him harder in his divorce for it. But I had to curtail his assignment, and he went on to another post. So those kind of issues, Medevacs and you know and things, were always at the forefront.

Q: Why don't we talk about the personnel issues before we move into the —

USSERY: — the meat and potatoes?

Q: Yes.

USSERY: The meat and potatoes were the bilateral side.

Q: This would be the first time you were up against these competing things, particularly the military establishment, the CIA establishment, the AID establishment, and maybe there were others there — Voice of America, I guess — was it there?

USSERY: Yes. Voice of America was building its new regional transmission center in Tangier, so they had 40-something people up in Tangier. Probably the reason we had 800 employees was because in a developing country there weren't a lot of good local services, so we had 400 Moroccans, carpenters, painters, electricians, plumbers, drivers. We had a big AID operation because it was a big aid country at the time. We had a sizable CIA presence there, because CIA liked to train, have young officers cut their teeth in Morocco before moving on elsewhere in the Arab world. We had 175 Peace Corps volunteers, one of the five or ten biggest Peace Corps programs in the world. And we had Voice of

America with about 40 people up there doing a huge construction project in Tangier. USIA had a library in Marrakech and then had offices in Casablanca, Rabat. So we were in four cities. We had a total of more than 30 buildings under the US Embassy, including the chancery in Rabat, the consulate in Casablanca, the Tangier facility — and that's not counting housing — just 30 warehouses and official offices. It was too big, and with too big probably came 300 spouses and children.

Q: One of the things I've noticed, that it's not unusual but, the nicer the place, the more agencies tend to go- — the FAA, the FBI.

USSERY: The Marines ran the whole region, all the way to the Mideast and Cyprus, out of Casablanca, because it was a nice place to be. So to plop down regional offices — Labor Department had an attach# there. . .

Q: These things are almost impossible to —

USSERY: There must be something like a Peter Principle of how bureaucracies grow in nice places.

Q: Oh, they were. Well, I mean, Kenya had the same experience. I think it probably got a little bit more difficult there. One time Beirut was the same way.

USSERY: 12 federal agencies were under my authority in Morocco — 12 agencies.

Q: Did you make any effort to try to curtail this?

USSERY: I did. People in Washington at the State Department realized that Morocco was way too big and needed to be scaled back, so they said to me, “Please take a hard look at how to reorganize and restructure the embassy.” I went out there with John Hawes leaving as DCM. I needed to find a new DCM, and about a month into my tenure, Dick Jackson, the consul general, became the acting DCM. Dick and I worked so well together that about a month later I said, “Why don't you consider staying out here, if I can get the

Department to approve it, and be my deputy chief of mission?" Dick had already been in country for about almost six years. He'd been the political officer; then he became the consul general. So as we all know, it's highly unusual to be in country that long, and maybe when the Department approved Dick to be my DCM, he set the record for continuous years in one country. He ended up being out there over eight years. But at the time, Dick was dating and was soon to be engaged to a Finnish diplomat in Morocco, and that also suited his personal life choices at that time. He loved Morocco. And I thought we made a great team together. But we started the process of downsizing, and I think we started, at the Department's initiative, an unprecedented downsizing. There is a National Security Directive — NSDD 38 — which gives the ambassador the right to control the size of embassies. And no position can be out there that's not approved by the ambassador at any post. The ambassador can eliminate any position that he wants, and there's only a very elaborate appeals process that goes up immediately to the Secretary of State if an agency wants to contest a position that's abolished. So on paper, total authority for the ambassador — but NSDD 38 had never been tested on a very wide-scale basis before as a real downsizing tool. I went and I met with the people in Management, the under secretary of Management and others. There were task forces in the Department at the time — I forget the name — one headed by Ed Dillery, former ambassador to Fiji and a colleague of mine, always trying to reorganize the Department itself and embassies. And they were all encouraging me to go forward with it. And so I went through a process with the agencies, getting their input as to where they thought they could cut. Some were very cooperative; some of course, said, Oh, my God, we couldn't dare to lose any positions out of our 37 officers here in AID. AID said in three years maybe we could lose this one position when a program closes, and CIA couldn't lose anybody. Anyway, Dick and I finally pored over every position for a period of months, and we proposed 70-something positions, out of 218 official officer positions in the embassy — nothing to do with Peace Corps, nothing to do with the Foreign Service management staff, which itself was being downsized on a different program. We proposed 70-something of the 218 positions to be abolished over a period of about three years. If a position was to be abolished, we looked

at whether or not it should be abolished with an incumbent in mid-tour or at the end of their tour, or there might be a reason why the position was needed this year but wouldn't be needed after the following year. So, over a three-year period, we laid out a schedule for these, and we sent them in and, well, it was like walking into a beehive. I mean, some of the agencies just went ballistic about this, and certainly that includes some agencies who'd never been through an NSDD 38 process themselves. I'd say all of them were respectful and deferential — you know, nobody fired off any messages saying I was absolutely crazy — they usually sent out messages saying, “Well, we appreciate the ambassador's view, and we understand the strong pressure coming from Washington for Embassy Rabat to downsize, here's what we think.”

I wanted to move out the eight positions for the regional Marine Corps. These things went underway, and in fact, the Marines said, “Look, we'll leave Casablanca, but our problem is in our region, there's no other good post to be in. Okay, we don't have to be in Casa, but somebody tell us, where else can we be?” And it's a pretty tough, unstable region. And the problem was, what other ambassador was going to be happy to take the eight-person Marine unit in? Finally, after about two years, they moved to Cyprus.

But some of these transitions weren't easy. The CIA had to agree that in a bilateral sense some of their positions weren't really helpful to our mission in Morocco, but they didn't want to lose Morocco as a training ground for young officers. But eventually they were cut. And eventually, what happened was that the pressures to downsize continued to be, I think, so great that within three years after I left Morocco, eliminating 70-something positions wasn't even enough. At the embassy itself, things changed over the following three years where agencies themselves were trying to downsize their own agencies in the field and coming in with their own reductions. But really we spent a lot of time contesting half of those 70-something positions, where there initially was a resistance from the agency to lose those slots.

Q: What was your impression of AID?

USSERY: [Loud exclamation] I'm sorry, I don't know how you're going to transcribe that.

Q: Put down "Loud exclamation."

USSERY: I had a great working relationship with — out of the 12 agencies — all of them except AID and the defense attach#. I had a great working relationship with the CIA. I had a great working relationship with the other military office, which was doing military sales and equipment and logistical support to Morocco. But AID was a bureaucracy with an old mindset — I thought. They were always telling me how they were remodeling AID programs and were out of the business of the 1970's, where they were supporting infrastructure projects, and they were into new ideas, things I liked, like 600 short-term training programs for professionals and helping some Moroccan professionals get into MBA programs in the US. But I found it to be a bloated bureaucracy. They were doing some things I really applauded. They were trying, after so many years, 27 years supporting an agronomics institute, the Hassan Agronomics Institute, to finally say, "Look, you've had 20 years of support; now we need to cut the cord. You need to be able to make it on your own, or not. Either you make it as a private institution, or you don't." All these adjustments were heartbreaking to some and painful. But in fact, what really happened during my time there, just to be really brief about it, was the USAID mission in Morocco and USAID in Washington were having huge philosophical differences. I sided with USAID in Washington. I felt that the USAID program in Morocco was trying to cling to old ways and wasn't getting with the program fast enough. I was there for two years. The USAID director — who I liked personally but really felt was just impossible to deal with. . . . And in fact, I felt one of his views was that USAID was, in effect, a mission unto itself.

Q: This often happens.

USSERY: He really wanted to have as little as possible. . . . It's an impossibility, really, to not be part of the embassy. He's part and parcel with the embassy. But he wanted every inch he could find to be independent of the embassy, including his whole attitude

about community relations and involvement between his staff and other employees in the embassy. He wanted to be independent. They probably fraternized as little with other people in the embassy as any section.

And so after two years, Washington said his time was up to go. He asked for an extension for one more year — he'd already been there four. I didn't support his extension. Washington didn't support his extension. And they sent him off to Zaire. And in fact, it happened that they decided that the AID mission director in Zaire would come to Morocco. They switched places. And everybody in Washington USAID said, “You're going to love the new guy. We know this guy has been a pain in the neck for two years. You're going to love the new guy.” In the end, I couldn't find a damn bit of difference. I found the same arrogance, the same desire for independence. I felt that AID had a cultural mentality of “We're us, not you, not them, and we don't want to be the stepchild of the State Department.” And I was just as unhappy with the new AID director, and in fact, then ended in an issue with him. He had a 25-year-old son that came to live with him at post who was getting some USAID contract work, and I felt there was potentially a conflict of interest. And I told the AID mission director that, about how his son was getting USAID work, and he said, “Yes, but I'm not approving these contracts for my son. My assistant is.” And I couldn't make him see at least the appearance of a conflict that somebody he supervised was repeatedly giving his son a livelihood. And so we had our personal differences when I stopped that practice. So I was pleased that the objectives and the type of programs that AID's been doing have changed — not because of me, but I was certainly totally in agreement and encouraging the kind of change that's been going on out there — never enough, never far enough. But, as I say, in brief, that was my AID experience.

Q: One of the criticisms leveled at AID — I mean there are plenty of positive things, but criticisms leveled at AID — is it almost depends who is in charge of the staff they have. If they have tree experts, they plant a lot of trees. If they have fish experts, you'll have a lot of fish ponds — of this nature. And then when they leave, the fish ponds dry up or the

trees aren't watered because somebody else comes out, and they're into wheat or what have you. Did you find this?

USSERY: You know, not only did I find that, but found that if you're out there in Morocco, you can see unlimited needs. And one of the traditional AID development type of projects I support are women in development programs, because I do believe that when you have a more educated...

In fact, since Morocco, I helped lobby successfully for a $108 millions to be continued in the Foreign Aid Appropriations Bill for women in development programs, for education programs for poor women, because its effect on population. You have more population growth as you've got more productivity — for the women — because of their self-esteem. In other words, it's as I say one of the true traditional types of programs I favor, and it was threatened with being eliminated, zeroed out by the Senate three years ago, and I worked on it for a private consortium of international education-related nonprofit organizations.

But if you looked around Morocco, you could see unlimited need, and the problem simply became that a country with unlimited needs and a rapidly dwindling aid budget, sources became hard, because aid for Morocco had gone from $200 million in the mid-'80's to, by the time I was there, late '80's, early '90's, to $100 million. And now today it's probably a fourth of that as we cut aid programming. So it made for hard choices, and so I didn't disparage those who wanted to try to do more wheat programs, more basic programs — you know, I didn't criticize them as being out of touch — but I did disagree when we weren't trying to do more with the private-sector development, encourage less in the public sector and more in the private sector. So it was hard choices, but I agree fully that you take people who've been trained for 20 to 30 years at a certain type of programming and then tell them, “Here's the new wave in aid programming” — especially since . . . and reduced aid budgets — and you get major resistance, and old biases die hard.

Q: How did you find the AID scheduling? I just interviewed a man who was ambassador to Gabon who was saying that S#o Tom# was a rather lush place but it needed seed and other things of this nature. He went and found out, yes, they had seed. The AID person had what they needed. It was available. But then he went and found that it was not in the program for that year. And it ended up they did have money for a trickle-type agriculture, which was designed for a desert area. This wasn't, but he was able to get something like that. In other words, there seemed to be a rigidity and unresponsiveness on the part of the program. Did you find a problem there?

USSERY: Well, the rigidity was, again, to the biases — old or new biases — they were to the biases of the AID people. And I felt — maybe I sound like I'm putting them in a “Catch 22” — you know, you've got huge pressure from the governments out there, including the Government of Morocco, for what they want AID to do in their country, which is at odds with what we often want to do. I found I had AID mission directors who managed to upset and displease everybody and offend everybody — you know, the Government of Morocco people — and let them know that their ideas were idiotic, and people in Washington who felt they were going too far too fast down a different path. So I found myself trying to adjudicate or become an influence in Washington often against the views of my own AID mission directors — but that's life, that's the way it goes sometimes.

Q: You were saying you had problems with the defense attach#.

USSERY: Well, I actually had three defense attach#s, but the head, the DATT, in particular, his two deputies — I had three colonels, three defense attach#s who were colonels — but the defense attach# himself was a Vietnam hero. He was a colonel in the Marines, he was a helicopter pilot, and he'd never done anything like being a defense attach# his whole life. So maybe many people say the same thing about politically appointed ambassadors who were plucked out of the blue, but I found taking a Marine who was near retirement and had nothing to do with the attach# program and overnight trying to turn him into an attach# was a recipe for a debacle. There are plenty of people who

come up through the attach# system. There were people under him who had. But there are so many who come from other fields and then are thrown into one attach# training program and sent out to an embassy. And this hard-charging Marine did not have the feel or the touch to be an attach#. All he knew how to do was charge ahead with his ideas about what ought to be happening in country. He felt that the way to impress everybody in the embassy and in the US was to show that he could do it on his own; he was a leader and he was out there not having to be babied around. And consequently, he made a lot of mistakes because he actually had very bad judgment for the diplomatic international world.

Q: It sounds like the classic problem of what you do with a warrior when you don't have a war on.

USSERY: Well stated. Yes. And so he was out there breaking a lot of china, and sadly enough, not just out of some conviction, but actually just to say, “Look at what a great job I'm doing, guys, and I'm making things happen without supervision.” So of course, consequently, we had to start micromanaging him more, and the problem was, though, that when you corrected him, usually he could never understand the other side to it. He was so programmed to where he couldn't imagine why his reports were not accurate or why he didn't understand the nuances. So I started having a series of conversations with the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency about my displeasure with him. They finally, after seeing for themselves some of these results, said to me, “If you want to fire him, you can. We will certainly fully support your decision if you want to terminate him at any time.” So by style and nature, I said, “No, let's try to fix him a little bit and rehabilitate him and guide him along.” And things were better for a while. They were better in his last year out there, but never good, and he too asked if he could stay another year, and I couldn't support that. And Washington didn't think that was a good idea either. So they brought in a professional defense attach#. The incumbent asked if he could stay over a couple of weeks and overlap with his successor to guide him through. I didn't permit that because I felt like the new guy would do better not being influenced or polluted by his predecessor.

He had nothing important to contribute to do that, and his successor wasn't asking for that kind of support.

And one of the things I supported with the Defense Intelligence Agency was that we didn't need an airplane in Morocco. I forget whether there were six or ten of these small airplanes around the world, and one was in Morocco; and for Morocco purposes, we didn't need it. We had three extra people in the embassy just to take care of the airplane. As part of the downsizing, I said, “Sure, it's a nice luxury to be able to get an airplane flight from Rabat down to Marrakech and not drive three hours each way, but I can't let personal prerogatives. . . . We can let go of the airplane. It's a nice toy to have, but in terms of world value for intelligence purposes, it's not justifiable.” And again, that was one where the Defense Intelligence Agency really agreed and said yes.

Q: I would have thought there would be yowls from the people who were there. I mean obviously you needed an airplane for a place like the Congo.

USSERY: That's right.

Q: — but —

USSERY: — in a country that's manageable by roads, with good. . . . Also, I never used — I don't think I ever used — in-country commercial flights. Now there are even a lot more, but maybe even then there was good rail, air, and road surface transportation in Morocco. So anyway, we put the plane out to pasture. They sent it down into West Africa to hop around countries.

Q: We're talking about the military side. What were our military concerns?

USSERY: Well, when I went out, I was very excited about two things that I thought were going to happen with Morocco, that were really going to change the bilateral relationship

strategically. One was that we were losing an F-16 wing for NATO in Spain. The Spanish did not want a US military presence.

Q: They were closing Torrejon.

USSERY: Closing Torrejon, right. So for NATO purposes, we needed that wing of aircraft to protect us — the NATO plan said for protecting southern Europe. So I had been advocating since my State Department time, let's explore taking this to Morocco. There are very few countries in the 1980's that could contemplate adding a US military presence in country, or a NATO presence in a non-NATO country. And Morocco was one of those exceptions. And the Moroccans had three military bases that they were not utilizing fully. One of them, Benguerir, had been used by the US military between World War II and the 1970's to fly in big strategic bombers.

Q: E-47's at one time was the big thing.

USSERY: Was it before? Okay.

Q: Well, maybe not there. Another one.

USSERY: And so this really says something about the US-Moroccan relationship or a good glimpse of it at the time. The Moroccans were delighted to capture our interest more politically and permit us, and make the statement, “Look, the Europeans don't want you up there, but your real friends do.” So one of the things we were going to do was we were going to put the wing into Benguerir. It was just going to be such an exciting thing to happen on my watch.

The other was we were going to sell 24 F-16's to the Moroccans. We had to figure out how to finance them.

Q: F-16 being our premier fighter plane.

USSERY: Premier fighter planes, the hot toy all the developing countries wanted to replace the American F-5's that the Moroccans had, or at least on top of the F-5 system. And at that time there was a lot of talk that the Gulf countries would help Morocco purchase the F-16's.

Q: We're talking about the Persian Gulf.

USSERY: From the Persian Gulf — the Saudis and the Emirates would help in doing that. Those were two things that I had right at the very front, the top of my list, going out there. Well, you know, a funny thing happened on the way to the Forum. The Berlin Wall fell down, and the Soviet Empire started to collapse. So the idea of needing to put F-16's in Morocco or sell the Moroccans their own F-16's changed drastically. NATO found it easy not to consider any more moving the wing down to Morocco.

Q: They moved it to Italy.

USSERY: Italy. They got the Italians to take it and keep it inside there. And the F-16's — our desire to bend over backwards to help the Moroccans in the financing of the F-16's basically disappeared. We just didn't feel the need to be out there arming the Moroccans and everybody else as we did in the Cold War.

Q: It's interesting that George Bush, coming from Texas, and the F-16 being a Texan product — it showed up in the next election of '92, sales to Taiwan I think it was. Anyway, F-16's were not only a good military investment but a political thing. Coming out of being a Bush person, did that enter in at all?

USSERY: No, I never felt an ounce of push to try to do this for US commercial interests out there. There were too many countries at the time buying up US arms, including the F-16's. But the manufacturers, sure, they were out there. They'd love to have done it. But that message never came through government circles, not at all. So we negotiated the F-16 deal with the Moroccans. I was very pleased about my contributions and my role in

the negotiating process, but the plug ended up being pulled before we ever sent it to the US Congress for approval.

Q: What about commercial interests? I wouldn't think there would be much in the way of commercial.

USSERY: A very good question. There wasn't much in the way of commercial, but two things were coming together at one time: the diminution of US aid and the development of the Moroccan private sector. And to me they pointed towards a real shift from a US aid relationship to a private-sector relationship between Morocco and the US. And so I felt that outside of the general political environment and the military relationship, the other anchor was going to be the commercial relationship. And I wanted to move as fast as we could in the commercial, because Morocco — and certainly since my time out there — has developed into a very nice emerging market with a very impressive private sector for a developing country. So we started shifting the focus and trying to encourage more US-private-sector investment and trade with Morocco. We did what we could on the periphery. We negotiated and signed a bilateral investment treaty, protection on trade and on taxes. We worked on the tariffs and trade issues with the Moroccans, but looking back now after seven years since I left post, things have really continued to develop. Morocco is a mid-sized developing country, 28 million people today. It's not tiny. It's certainly not one of the big markets. I think things are coming together nicely. I think there's a large amount of European investment, and there's a nice development in the Moroccan micro-economics and their own development of industry and commerce in Morocco itself by Moroccan companies — companies which didn't exist seven years ago. But overall the numbers aren't overwhelming; they're not staggering. Morocco will never, even with a better economy, enjoy the kind of interest that India or China or even Egypt continues to enjoy from an investor standpoint.

Q: Were you seeing any return during the time you were there on the Moroccans who were getting the MBA from America? Were you seeing sort of an American style?

USSERY: What I sensed overall from my time in Morocco was they were deliberately trying to turn away from so much dependence on their French relationship, and their first choice was to become closer to the US. And this manifested itself in many ways. One of those was more prominent Moroccan families sending their kids to the US for education. At the time I was there we had tracked that about 1,500 Moroccans had been educated in the US, and in the past seven years if that number hasn't doubled or quadrupled I'd be surprised. And so I created a little program inside the embassy through USIA to maintain the database and develop ties with that young generation of Moroccans who'd been educated in the US. I felt like part of the future of the US Moroccan relationship, as well as the future of Morocco itself, was going to be those US-educated students. And twice I held big annual soirees, parties, for alumni of American universities, and there were already three organizations, created by Moroccans, for alumni of American universities. I encouraged them to work together. In my time, they folded together into two organizations. I think maybe since they've even folded up into one umbrella organization. So I thought at that time it was important, and even thought it had to start as a small program. I knew the numbers were going to just keep growing and growing. Instead of just the old families, you were beginning to get more and more students going from middle-class Moroccan families and coming back and possibly becoming the new hot professionals and entrepreneurs in Morocco.

Q: You mentioned France. You know, the story former French colonies — Morocco was never quite a colony, a protectorate — the French have been suspicious of the United States, and from what you're saying, they've got damn good reason to be.

USSERY: One of the ways I thought of my job was to see how much we could take away from the French. I felt that even though they were the 800-pound gorilla walking around Morocco, and I was just a little 200-pound gorilla, my job was to do as much as I could. And certainly the French saw it that way. The French saw a rivalry. Of course when it's not a life and death situation, it's more fun to be the 200-pound gorilla that's growing

than the 800-pounder that sees himself losing part of the jungle territory all the time. And so I mapped out a nonstop first three months: calls on the government, meetings with everybody inside the embassy; and calls on other ambassadors — with the idea that my second call on other ambassadors after the dean would be the French ambassador. I wanted to rush over there and introduce myself and try to have a congenial collegial relationship and sort of a friendly rivalry. The meeting went fine, but France had one of its premier diplomats in Morocco at that time, who went on to be their ambassador to the United Nations. He'd been their ambassador in Egypt. And no matter how much I tried, he refused to warm to me during my time out there. And we ended up with a truly nonexistent relationship — hellos and how-are-yous when we found ourselves seated together at dinners or passing in receptions or whatever, but he always kept his distance and a very cool tone toward me.

Q: Today is the 16th of February, 1999. Just to put me back in the picture, you were in Morocco from when to when?

USSERY: I arrived the first week in January of 1989 and left January 16, 1992.

Q: Okay, Mike, would you talk a little bit about tourism and the care and feeding of tourists and sort of the American expatriates and that sort of thing?

USSERY: Well, Morocco has certainly been an attractive tourist destination, though much more for the Europeans. The numbers when I was there were up to two million tourists a year, but only about 100,000 Americans — still a sizable number — and we didn't really see the tourists so much. We only had a few incidents while I was there. We had some woman who basically was having a psychological incident, going crazy and running down to the embassy telling us that she had been barricading herself in her hotel and the Moroccans were trying to kill her. And we tracked down her family in the States and got her out of there. We had one woman in her 30's die in her sleep at a hotel, so we had to do a little investigating, an autopsy and all, to make sure there was no foul play.

And we had a couple of other tourists who were scuba diving in the Mediterranean, near Tangier, and got swept up in some current, brought them up too fast, gas filled their lungs, and they died in that incident. But otherwise, there weren't too many things happening over on the tourist side. Before I'd gone to Morocco, in fact when I was working on Libya and in the aftermath of the Libyan bombing raid, some Moroccan came up in the bazaar in Marrakech, pulled out a knife, and attacked some tourist yelling something about the Americans, and did fatally wound a British tourist. But in the last 15 years that's the only incident against American tourists that I know of, other than many of them overpaying for rugs and trinkets, as they tend to do.

Q: What about drugs?

USSERY: In Morocco that's a good question. Morocco was a destination of legendary proportions in the 60's and 70's — the road to Marrakech, for druggies around the world, for the drug culture, and for hashish. But drugs had not been a real problem in terms of the tourists. I mean, the tourists weren't over there doing large drug dealing or sizable drug dealing. There weren't incidents. There weren't overdoses reported of tourists. But what happened, though, was that there was still a considerable amount of hash trade in the northern part of Morocco going into Europe. But since it wasn't really coming to the US, it actually made it a lower priority drug country for ourselves, plus it wasn't a transit point for heroin or anything like that. So the opiate up in the north, called kif, we were always trying to come up with substitute farming programs and trying to get drug acreage eradicated and then converted into farmland, but even over a long period of time we haven't had a lot of success. It's a relatively minor problem.

Q: I understand kif — I think in Somalia or something — the whole country sort of goes on a mild high in the afternoon, and you really have to get your business done in the morning.

USSERY: Yes, thank God, I have the impression that for the Moroccan youth of the day, most of them growing up without ever having experienced kif. Probably 15-20 years

ago, probably most Moroccan youth at some point had tried it, but thank God it wasn't a national pastime or a national high, certainly more so in the rural countryside of the north. I thought Morocco, compared to the US and other places, managed to keep a fair amount of control and the scope of their drug problem down. It seemed that they were probably less attentive — which always suggested the possibilities of corruption — in allowing kif to go out of the north of Morocco into Europe, and better at controlling the distribution of the drug inside their own country.

Q: What about Tangier? Tangier used to have the reputation of having a really dissolute expatriate community, Brits, Americans, Europeans and all that. In your time was it?

USSERY: The heyday of the expatriate community in Tangier had definitely passed by the time I arrived on the scene. What was left was a very small, dwindling, and aging population that hadn't been replenished by younger avant garde types. And some of the cult icons from the earlier days — and most notably Paul Bowles — were still in Tangier. Bowles was there. When I met him he was in excellent condition and a very interesting individual, but well into his 80's at that point in time. He had just had sort of a reawakening about his work, because the movie The Sheltering Sky was being made at that time based on his novel. I found Paul Bowles not the least bit interested in fame or any high level of attention on his very private life; at the same time, I also found him, interestingly, very distantly removed from what life is in America today. I forget he told me how often he'd visited the US and the last time he'd visited it. It wasn't very often. I really felt in some ways that he was a man who offers marvelous insights and who lived a fascinating life, but he was totally out of touch with what life in America was in the 1980's and 90's.

Q: Well, what about going through some of our list here? How did you find relations with Algeria, Libya, and Mauritania — let's take Algeria first — during the time you were there?

USSERY: There were definitely border problems with Algeria. While the age-old problem between Algeria and Morocco has been the Sahara and Algeria's support of

the Polisario's claim to the Western Sahara, a new problem has been cropping up, which is fundamentalism. And I think, as I talked to you about earlier, fundamentalism in Algeria seemed to catch most of the governments in West Europe and the United States by surprise. And while we're all watching Tunisia and Egypt, a very virulent form of fundamentalism burst open in Algeria. And as you look back at it, certainly the breeding-ground conditions for fundamentalism were there and ripe in Algeria — the poverty, the unemployment, the feeling of disenfranchisement all in a Muslim country. Morocco started closing the border with Algeria as a way to control fundamentalists from entering the country. And, in fact, Morocco was worried it was starting to get the contagion up around Oujda and around the Algeria border. So relations for the most part were pretty poor all during that time, though at the beginning the king and the Algerians worked pretty closely on trying to get a new agreement for Lebanon. But that was very sporadic. At the same time, they were also trying to balance this and form the Maghreb Union. Its nexus required the Algerians and the Moroccans to cooperate. But the seesaw was always up and down on that one, between a little bit closer and then a little bit more distant relationship between the Algerians and the Moroccans. To date it's been something of a futile effort to really create an open market throughout North Africa.

Libya — it was very interesting. The first few months were maybe the most fascinating for me in Morocco; arriving there and in my first months going to a state dinner for Margaret Thatcher. The king walking Margaret Thatcher out and over to introduce her to my wife and me and say, “This is the new young ambassador from the United States.” We were there as we changed our rules and dialogue with the Palestinians. And early on, also in early '89, the king managed to pull off an Arab summit in Casablanca — no small feat, given all the animosities in the Arab World, to get all the heads of state together. So there I was sitting in a balcony, finding it hard to believe that I was 60 feet away from Assad, from Saddam Hussein, from Muammar Qadhafi, from Arafat, some of the great adversaries, if not enemies, of the United States. And after the summit broke open, I was outside, and all of a sudden, ten feet in front of me, maybe six, was Muammar Qadhafi. He comes

out, stops, starts talking to the press right in front of me. Of course, he has no idea that I'm the American ambassador, much less that I'm somebody that's been involved in the confrontation against Libya. It was really an incredible moment for me, to see these people up close, the people that I'd really been plotting against and planning against so hard, to really see them in the flesh was quite the experience. I remember just gazing into Qadhafi's face, just studying his face for a minute there. But for the Moroccans, Libya was somewhere out there. You know, it wasn't a neighbor. It's not their immediate problem. While we think of the Maghreb and Libya and they're all in the same neighborhood, for the Moroccans sometimes Libya was the farthest thing from their minds.

Q: It's a hell of a long ways away, really.

USSERY: Yes.

Q: How did the summit come off?

USSERY: The summit managed to bandage together better words of unity than most have done but, again, like others, to no lasting effect. I can't remember the last Arab summit where one can point to a real accomplishment, other than the accomplishment probably being to assemble everybody in one room together.

Q: Did Mauritania run across — I mean, you know, it has a border, but did that — ?

USSERY: Mauritania was worse than the poor bastard child of the region. I couldn't seem to get any attention even in most of our conversations when we were talking about the Sahara. There were occasionally a couple of close skirmishes or accusations of shots being fired between Mauritanian and Moroccan troops, but I've always been told that the truth is, when you're down there on the Sahara-Mauritania border, God only knows where the actual border is, and troops have been known to slip across boundaries, maybe unintentionally. And so, no, very little interest or emphasis on Mauritania in my time.

Q: How about the end of the Cold War?

USSERY: The end of the Cold War was a remarkable period. I think I talked earlier about how the end of the Cold War had the effect of really squashing some rather fantastic plans for military cooperation with the Moroccans — F-16's and maybe moving an F-16 wing to Morocco, things that would have been quite extraordinary. They lost their raison d'#tre with the end of the Cold War. But certainly, in the fall of 1989, certainly a glorious time for me — the birth of my son and watching the Berlin Wall come down. Today, of course, with satellite dishes and all, you can sit in Morocco and have your choice of TV channels from Europe. But when I was there, we could only really get one European channel, the Sky News report, and the two Moroccan channels. But I just remember sort of endlessly trying to tune in and watch developments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Soviet Union, and certainly Germany as the Cold War came to a crashing climax. And it was great to be the American ambassador. There was a new aura about being the Americans during that collapse of the Communist empire. So it made for a very interesting and exciting time. I've always thought of my experience in Morocco as being a very good classic case of having an opportunity of being a big fish in a small pond. That was nice. I don't need a lake or an ocean.

Q: How about the Gulf War? This was a time when President Bush was making an all-out effort of getting as many flags as he could, particularly of Arab countries, to go against Iraq and Saddam Hussein after he had seized Kuwait in the summer of 1990.

USSERY: It was the most interesting work period for me, but it was also the hardest period of time. In the end I always said thank God it was a short war. The Moroccans were in a very nervous position, not liking Saddam but definitely concerned about breaking ranks in the Arab World, offending some of the other Arabs. Of course, the Arabs were divided themselves, as the Gulf Arabs rallied around the Kuwait cause. The king being a monarch, that was his natural instinct too, his natural allegiance. At the same time, he saw little upside to be gained in angering Saddam, other Arabs, and his own population,

which could not really understand why he should be with the West against him. In fact, I think one of the interesting parts of being in the region was to really have it driven home how little man-on-the-street sympathy there was for the Kuwait cause. And frankly, for Moroccans, who've had plenty of Gulf visitors from ruling families in the Gulf come to summer homes in Morocco, they have a very bad taste about their rich cousins from the Mideast as arrogant, condescending rulers. I'm sure there was quite a bit of glad-they-got-theirs when Kuwait was overrun. So the king had to do quite the balancing act when his own predilection was very clear to be with the Gulf Arabs and the West.

The strangest part about the Gulf War for us was in December of 1990 as all embassies in the region began to look at their security issues in anticipation of a war. Right up until I think around the second week in January, when Jim Baker met with Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz, there were many who believed we had reason to hope for a solution to head off the war. The State Department started asking us hard questions on our security situation. We consistently reported back that, while we were taking all additional measures just to tighten procedures and brief the American community just to heighten awareness about security out there on the street, that we hadn't seen any threats. Intelligence threats had not come in towards any of us in Morocco, and we seemed very safe and comfortable (certainly with the prewar part) with the man on the street. By early January it became very clear that the operating principle in Washington was don't have another Iran. So it wasn't a very cold, analytical —

Q: You might explain what you meant by "don't have another Iran."

USSERY: Don't have another Iran, don't have hostages taken, don't be the guy who has to sit there and say you let American diplomats and others be taken hostage because you didn't have the foresight to get them out of a dangerous situation quickly enough. And with that becoming the operating principle, we found we were really talking past each other. We were trying to take a very clear, analytical look at what the situation was, and they were trying to really look politically at how to deal with the region. And politically, it was

since that we found out that in Israel and Saudi Arabia there was no talk of evacuating dependents, right there where missiles were going to be going off.

Q: They needed them to operate the oil fields.

USSERY: No, they didn't want to send alarm and messages of lack of confidence in the Saudi and Israeli governments and create panic, so their idea was let's keep everybody there. And 1,500 miles away in Morocco and 2,000 miles away from the Gulf War down in India and Pakistan, particularly Pakistan, let's start thinking about getting the hell out of there. And we were sort of in a state of disbelief. We couldn't believe we were having the conversation. I held two public meetings inviting dependents to come because there were so many rumors going around of what was happening. I thought the best way to do it was to have an open forum each time, tell people everything we knew, how we saw the situation, and invite their questions and try to answer them. And I gave people my philosophical view. I said, if we have a war, my view is that if you as a dependent feel that you don't want to be here, you should have the right to leave. If you're not comfortable, I don't think you should be forced to stay. Neither am I in favor of saying people should be arbitrarily evacuated. Well, it was three days before war broke out, we got a call saying pretty much like we want to do a major evacuation of Morocco. I was stunned, and certainly the planning side of Morocco in the United States was clearly ready for war to break out and wasn't going to wait and then go to evacuation. But to be so solid — it was about a final 24 hours when they said, “Tell us why not. If you can't give us why not, then we're going to get into how many people should be evacuated.” And early on a Saturday morning, I got a phone call, which would have been probably the middle of the night in Washington, telling me we're going to evacuate. Now let's get down to how many people. Well, I knew at that point there was nothing to do to stop it other than just register my protest, that we had a big undertaking in front of us. We had people in Marrakech. We had 40-something people in Tangier, a consulate in Casablanca, an embassy in Rabat. And this was also going to apply as an open opportunity for expatriates. What we had to do was: first of all, all dependents were being ordered to leave the post; any expatriate

who wanted to leave, organize for them transportation, advise them. I think there was a total of about 1,500 Americans in the country; there were about 600 and something official Americans out of that number, including family members; and Dick Jackson, my deputy, quickly hit on the idea that probably the best way to get everybody out, better than trying to get people on various commercial flights through Europe, was to see if we could charter an airplane from Royal Air Maroc. And we were able to arrange to organize a flight. And of course, you know, it was bedlam to put out a notice, over a weekend, to people that they had 48 hours to leave post, to get them the rules. Then, to add quickly, Dick and I had to deal with how big the official American numbers should be. Washington was trying to plan on under a hundred official Americans left out of the 220 official Americans at post. I went through section by section, agency by agency, slot by slot, and came up with 150 that I would like to declare as essential and to stay through the war. That led to a conversation over the weekend with the Under Secretary for Management, Ivan Selin. He got on the phone and said, “Got to get the numbers down. We thought you could get them down to under a hundred?” I said, “Well, I really did it slot by slot.” Ivan said, “Well, I tell you what, I'm going to let you have 125 to start with, because that's the most you can get in one of these helicopters, and so one trip with a helicopter, 125 — that's what I'm going to give you. Pick them out.” So I remember hanging up the phone, going, I don't know anything about helicopters. I don't know what helicopter could hold 125 people, but I knew this: the under secretary was imagining some huge helicopter landing in the middle of an embassy compound under assault by raving, ranting Moroccans, and that only 125 of us could get on there, and that was what he was going to allow. So I wasn't going to bother asking him what the hell this helicopter was, and I sure wasn't going to point out to him that we're located in four different cities in this country, because I think he would have just cut our numbers more. And as I say, to me it was a hell of a way to run a railroad. As war broke out, many of the people who a week before, families who thought they would stay in Morocco if given an option, wouldn't want to go, really started changing their minds and their mood, and many of the dependents and many of the officers wanted their families to

get out. But I'd still say at least for half of those who were leaving, of the dependents, they were very upset about being separated on a forced basis.

The other great issue, though, of course, was the unpleasant issue of trying to tell somebody they're nonessential. And just over half the people who would have chosen to stay, and almost half were being told, in effect, “You practically have nothing useful to do — go.” There was some logic to it though, that I think eased the blow. I mean, it was very hard to imagine what a lot of AID workers were going to be able to accomplish during the middle of a war, and we weren't going to be advancing AID programs very much at that point in time. I remember one of the ones where I was more lenient by far than Dick Jackson's recommendation was the CIA. I only wanted a very modest cut in the CIA force there. I thought the CIA could have a very important role, like the political section and the defense attach# and others. Of course, I found that if you nick the CIA they go crazy. You know for the CIA to take the smallest cut in the embassy, they were probably bellowing more than any other section about how awful and unfair and unwise this was. So I went through a day — I'd gone through really two rounds with them. I went through one round where everybody had a chance to appeal to the section heads to have the chance to appeal what I planned to do. That was when it was about 150. Then after that I made a few changes to accommodate some wishes, or in some cases, I let them switch another officer for one I was targeting to go out. So they'd let them say, no, it would be better if this one went and this one stayed. But then after we got cut to 125, I went back and said, here it is, here's the final, here's what's got to be. I got the usual amount of grumbling from all around, but in the end, we knew we were headed for this major evacuation. More than 600 people were going to leave out of the whole mix, officers, family, and expatriates — over 300 of them on one flight — and my wife and son were on that flight. And at that moment, I felt, Okay, I'm not wise enough to know what lies ahead, so maybe I should be glad they're going back. People had a choice of going back and being put up in temporary lodging in Washington if they didn't have a residence or going anywhere in the United States to stay with family, being given some kind of per diem to cover those costs. Somebody had

a family in Europe. They made a case-by-case special request to stay elsewhere outside the United States. We had the administrative section and others working full speed on the evacuation details, issuing orders, paperwork for everybody — you know, what a monstrosity — and the administrative team did a great job over the weekend. About a day before the evacuation, I took my wife and son, who was 15 months old at the time, went out to the zoo in Rabat, had a terrific day, and the next day we all went out, scores of us, out at the airport, which was a very sad goodbye because God knows when you're going to see your family members again, being separated. It was hard for me, but I also knew I needed to get around and speak to everybody I could, see how everybody was doing. I remember a new officer, the new head of the USIA there, had only arrived a month before, and there he was just breaking down in tears, and his wife and daughter and son were about to get on the plane. And in my family, my son got sick going over on the plane and had to be taken to the hospital when he got off the plane, with an incredibly high fever and everything. But they put him on antibiotics and he was fine two days later. So as they left, there we were, and I would say that out of 125, there were 110-115 men, about 10 women, there left at post to go about the work.

During the war, two things happened. One is Morocco went topsy-turvy. The people on the street went Pan-Arab overnight, while the King sent 1,600 Moroccans to fight, as a symbolic force, with us in the Gulf. The Moroccan people sided en masse with Saddam and Iraq, inflamed every day by very irresponsible papers, which had us deliberately bombing orphanages and killing Iraqis. And so we really did have to huddle up. And we could not get out of the embassy very much. I mean we were very judicious about travel. I went out to have conversations about the Gulf War, but what were we really going to sound out Morocco? What were we really going to produce about the Gulf War? And of course, we didn't have any official notice of when the bombing would begin, so we were awakened during the night to the fact that the bombing had begun and started following that and how much things have changed in just a few years. But at that time we didn't have a TV at the embassy that could pick up international because we didn't have our own

satellite. So as I say, that's changed tremendously. In fact, while I was at the embassy, we had one fax machine for the embassy — this new thing called a fax — while all my friends in the United States were trying to keep in touch with me by faxes from their homes, and I was like, “Well, how come we've only got one fax? We've got such a big embassy and we have one fax, about 10 computers, and no satellite dish.” So now I feel like we were back in the Stone Age. But the Hyatt hotel gave us a room, a permanent room, with a TV, so we could follow CNN. People from the embassy could go over there any time and watch the Gulf War. CNN, as you recall, really ushered in a new era of round-the-clock coverage of a war, something we hadn't seen before.

But the other thing that happened, besides the topsy-turviness of the Moroccans, was total tedium. It was probably the three most boring months I can remember in my life because a lot of other normal bilateral business just shut down, and as I say, there was very little we could do to affect the Gulf War. We sat around bored to tears, and of course, it killed the social night life that all of us diplomats are used to. Very Spartan amount of dinners with other diplomats. The Moroccans, it just wasn't an appropriate time to be out wining and dining with Moroccan officials. We did our business very properly in their offices during the day. So it was a boring time. I remember celebrating my birthday January 20, a few days after my family had left, and my wife, Betsy, and Greg went to stay with her mother up in Maine. And other than the separation and worrying about me, they had a very nice winter up in Maine, enjoying the snow and Greg going out on the frozen lake and feeding the ducks. But for me, I sat there at the house with all the shutters closed and read most nights and started smoking again, and sort of chain smoked at night to pass away the boredom. And to the question of “How did I spend the war?” I'd say the answer is “Very bored.”

Q: The Moroccan Government from the king on down, how did they react to this evacuation?

USSERY: That was a very tough thing. I think they never showed that they were upset, but I think that the king had to be disappointed, had to feel like, “My God, are you people really worried here in Morocco and that we can't protect you?” He didn't say that, but that was basically what we knew the reaction would be, find it hard to really understand this and maybe taking it in stride in the sense of “those crazy Americans — those Americans do things like that.” Notifying the Moroccan Government was one of the toughest parts of that whole weekend. I went and saw the foreign minister and told him, and he took it very stoically, very matter-of-factly, but I knew in his mind he was probably going “Oh, my God, they're really worried about Morocco, what can happen here.” We saw the reports, huge scores of people being evacuated in Pakistan, very, very large numbers. In the end, Tunisia had about a hundred officers left, which I found disproportionate. Again, there seems to be a rule, that seems to be a manageable number, though a hundred was a much, much higher percentage of that smaller embassy. In terms of percentage of cuts, I'd taken a big whop. So within about two weeks' time in the war, Washington then started saying, “We really think you ought to get down to a smaller number. We're now uncomfortable and nervous with 125 Americans down there. Can't you get down to under 100?” And I finally drew it down to about 90-something. We evacuated 30-something, 40 more people in time. We had a couple of people, of the officers, who came and asked me to be permitted to go, but those were more the case of family hardships. So it was an interesting time to be there as more of a core group with 90-something people, smaller and more intimate, I must say.

Q: What about the fabled Arab mob that was always supposed to . . . that you had to watch out about?

USSERY: I'd say this. By the way, one of the funny little things at the beginning of the war was that of course the State Department has the flash message system, which can get you news in seconds, which seemed to be a terrific thing back before Internet. We had an unbelievable system that could send a message in seconds somewhere around the

world, and then alarm bells would go off. I was being roused out of bed the first few nights at around two o'clock and three o'clock in the morning and told please come in, you've got a flash message here. So I'd come, I'd drive myself over — there was no way I was going to take time to get bodyguards (one of them didn't even have a telephone) — go over there to find that the flash was saying that a SCUD missile has just been launched at Israel or Saudi Arabia. So finally, after three or four days of this, I sent off a message that said, “I really appreciate the very efficient and timely communication; however, I find I'm unable to do absolutely anything about the SCUD missiles being launched.” So they finally took me off the flash level of distribution. But as we got into it, in addition to our own continued drawdown of people, dependents started raising hell in Israel and Saudi Arabia to get out of those countries. And finally, a few weeks in, the State Department had to cave on its position and start letting people, those who wanted to come out, come out. And people started leaving, especially, as I say, with missiles exploding out there. The masses — the king was not willing to permit constant demonstration during the war. At the same time, there was a feeling that there was a lot of pent-up feeling, that the people wanted to be able to let out their feeling in favor of Iraq. The king finally blessed one rally, one long parade, to be held on a Sunday early in February. We had some people go down, get on rooftops, to try to see and gauge the reaction, which included American flags and Israeli flags at the front of the parade being burned. But otherwise it was a very orderly parade. Our analyst, our security officer or CIA officer, underestimated the turnout at about 50, 000 demonstrators. Even if they were wrong by a factor of 50 percent, it was about that size. Somewhere between, people said, as low as 30,000 . . . the most responsible estimate that was still probably near the ball park probably said 100,000, some other source. But we woke up to the news on the radio the next morning on the BBC to how there had been a million people in Morocco march, a story which actually was reported about Morocco from a BBC correspondent in Tunisia, who called a couple of the organizers of the parade and then sent the report in, irresponsibly, to a veteran journalist, nonetheless, to London and then around the world. People in the State Department and others were contacting us: “Oh, my God, do you feel safe? Are you guys okay? We heard about this million-

man march.” And oh, this is really a dicey situation over there. But no, that was the only outpouring of expression that really ever solidified.

Near the end of the Gulf War, before we got into the land action, during all the small period of air bombing, I was then sending in messages saying that I feel that the king, the risk he's taking with his troops over there, we're not showing enough appreciation for the delicate position he's in, and somewhat the peril he puts himself in with his own populace in Morocco over his position — because the people don't support him on this. So what can we do? And that led to deputy secretary Eagleburger making a stop in Morocco to talk to the king. And really, to my surprise, we then told the king we wanted to brief him on what our plans were going to be for the invasion and what our strategy was for the land assault. Well, I was very surprised. I had urged that we come out and do a little stroking of the king, but it had never crossed my mind to trust the Moroccan generals and a handful of Moroccans with our most secret of battle plans. That was like, Oh, my God, is this wise? But we did, and they were quite impressed, and of course, it did hold secret.

The other thing I asked was that Eagleburger bring something besides messages of good will. So Eagleburger came and they accepted one of my recommendations, which was they invite the king to a state visit after the Gulf War. Well, I knew the king wouldn't accept on the spot. He didn't know what was about to lie ahead, and if he dared and wanted to be in America in the same year, but he appreciated the invitation. He said, “Well, let me look at it and I'll think about it, and we'll discuss it later.” Which he ended up coming seven months later in September. And I'll discuss that later on. But he also, I thought wisely, chose not to see the briefing on the military plans. And sort of in his mind — I got to understand his thinking and know that he'd personally like to be able to say, “I didn't know what we were doing. I didn't know what was planned. I wasn't briefed on those.”

So then was the smashing success of the military operation. We quickly started and defeated the Iraqis. We started saying, okay, send our families back. And not surprisingly, Washington said, well, let's wait, let's see how the residue settles out there. and so

we were, maybe disingenuously, sending in a steady stream of “Gee, it's safe and easy” reports, and in fact, what happened that was also truly special was that the Moroccans were just tripping over themselves at our doorstep, every Moroccan official and businessman who could coming in, wanting to be closer to the Americans after this great victory. Moroccans in all walks of life told us, “Oh, well, we were wrong about Saddam.” And totally, not only were there not hard feelings, but a total psychological flip occurred in the period of 100 days from adamant for Saddam to saying “oh, never mind what we said during the Gulf War; we didn't mean it, we just weren't thinking right, and sure glad you guys won the war.”

Q: Well, I'm told that in large areas of the world, the fact that this war was carried on CNN and available — and of course it was very one-sided because it was just showing what we were doing and all the technical gadgets and a certain amount of manipulation on the military part, showing what these wonder weapons would do — that in places work almost stopped in a lot of places because people were watching this war. Did that happen in Morocco?

USSERY: The Moroccan elite started getting their satellite dishes up and watching CNN. I met quite a few Moroccans who really learned English by watching CNN and augmenting their little rudimentary English. And they marveled at our technological and strategic success in the Gulf War. I mean, that was part of really being impressed with this great superpower that had won the Cold War: now they see how we've got smart bombs and how we'd destroyed armies that others like Iran had been bogged down with for 10 years, they were very impressed. I mean, they were doing homage to us. Everybody wanted to be closer than how they had been to Americans; they wanted to be even closer still. It was quite a thing to see. And I mean, because of that atmosphere, the king realized very quickly it was easy and in his interest to accept and plan to come to the United States in a short period of time after the war and to take that state visit.

Q: Well, now, what was our analysis at the time of why the Moroccan society turned to violently pro-Iraq?

USSERY: It just tapped into a pan-Arab reservoir that I think many Moroccans didn't even know existed themselves. And that sentiment carried the day psychologically, emotionally, almost without complete logic because, as I say, half the Arab world was on our side.

Q: Was there any sort of anti-Hussein . . . was this an easy opposition and all that?

USSERY: It was an easy way to show opposition to the Gulfies and to the US. In fact, with some of the slow pace of reforms and the inequities of Morocco I think it became a catch-all, a magnet for many kinds or labels of discontent to get under one umbrella and have a little feel-good session. But at most it was a psychological delusion of possible Arab greatness, that Iraq might defeat this superpower and the Arab world might enjoy new respect.

Q: How about Moroccan students?

USSERY: They were the most vocal. I mean, we were definitely told, unnecessarily, whatever you do, don't go on a Moroccan campus right now. We're trying to keep the ferment on campuses there on campus. We're not going to let these wild youth go out and stir up trouble outside the campuses. But, Mr. Ambassador, we don't really claim to have total control of what's going on with these campuses. They're a little scary right now.

Q: How long did it take to get the families back?

USSERY: They all started coming back about the first of April after the war. The war was a hundred-day war, starting in mid-January, so I guess it was about the first of May, excuse me. And about the first of April, those of us at the embassy, went basically in two shifts, for about a week or two weeks each, to go be with our families, and so at some times the embassy was down probably to about 50 officers at a time, as we all went home

and visited our families. Of course, these things are not without consequences. I mean a lot of school years were certainly seriously interrupted if not destroyed in some cases. Separation's harsh. But I think more than anything else, while it was very hard for me to be away from my family — I had a wonderful time when I went visiting them for longer than a week in May — it really made me appreciate more the kind of sacrifice that others had made in the previous wars, most notably the Second World War , where to be separated three to four months was nothing compared to what that generation endured. And so I tried to always take it with a philosophical view, and when I felt sorry for myself, to remind myself of my parents' generation, being apart six months, a year, and suffering much more hardship.

Q: What about American business connections and all, the industry?

USSERY: The American business community looked at us as its bellwether for business, the security of business, and all, and so it was a little bit difficult for us to tell them, “A lot of us are getting the hell out of here, but really, we think you're fine, just be careful that you're not . . . “ Certainly we advised everybody to be on heightened security because we didn't want a company to be a symbol of Americanism and become under attack in any kind of way. But at that time, though, the American commercial presence was still very small in Morocco, and many of these American companies operated as joint ventures with Moroccans and had really Moroccan names, and they were not big, visible signs or vestiges of the American corporate world.

Q: Well, then, did things pretty well get right back on course by the time —

USSERY: They were right back on course. The spring was very nice. The summer was very nice. We really rebounded into a special time. Even more than the end of the Cold War, at the end of the Gulf War we were leading a charmed life as the Americans. That really moved into the summer and fall. It was a terrific time for me, I think probably the most stimulating, at least since the beginning of my tenure there. Secretary Baker came

through on a Mideast trip in August. It had taken me a long while to argue that he should bother to talk to the Moroccans, and Baker, to my dismay, all his instincts told him to only talk to the core countries of the Mideast and not broaden the circle. That was certainly to the frustration of King Hassan and others who had been involved in the Peace Process for more than 25 years.

We had a great visit with Secretary Baker. The highest level visit I'd enjoyed before Baker's was Colin Powell who came out and stayed, and that was a delightful visit the previous year. But Baker came through in August, and at that time I had an overlap of DCM's for about one week. Dick Jackson on his way out but staying there to organize the paper trip, and Joan Plaisted, my new DCM, had arrived and was there to learn. It was too much to be drawn in and in your first week organize a visit of the Secretary of State. And then, six weeks later, in Washington, was the state visit of King Hassan, the first time he'd had a state visit in nine years, and I think the first time he'd been to the US in about five years. So I was very pleased to have that happen on my watch. It was challenging to prepare for a state visit and to be able to participate in one. It was sort of a crowning achievement in a bilateral relationship that is sometimes marked by a state visit, to be a guest at the White House for a state dinner, my wife and myself, it was really very enjoyable.

Q: I assume it went well.

USSERY: It went well. At that time though, there were a litany of state visits going on with developing countries. We had to finesse them. Five or ten years before, when we had lavish amounts of aid, being a developing country leader coming on a state visit almost assured you of a new infusion of aid to reward you for your trip. So we had to do much more creative things — commercial agreements, bilateral investment treaties, feel-good sessions, tie-ins with academic institutions. But it went well. The king was extremely pleased.

One of my predecessors, Joseph Verner Reed, was chief of protocol for Bush at the time. The king had chosen not to stay at Blair House. Instead he wanted to take over a suite at the Willard Hotel after a good inspection by his people. When I was deputy assistant secretary, there was a trip planned by the king (which was later canceled, but I was involved in the planning), and at that time Blair House was closed for renovation, and he was going to stay at the Madison Hotel. I had to go over the preparations of the Madison, and I remember being told that the rules of the day from the king included he never sleeps on the same mattress more than once and that there needed to be eleven other rooms made available for ladies who would be traveling with the king and so on and so on. When he came for his state visit, the king took over this huge presidential suite at the Willard Hotel. I was taking Cabinet secretaries in to meet with the king, the Treasury Secretary, the Commerce Secretary, others; the king wouldn't go out to call on them in their offices, of course; they would come to him. You'd go through this dense incense burning in the room, and once you made it past that first step, you were in there. And I looked around. It was all Moroccan furniture, with a big beautiful mahogany desk with a fantastic H carved on it with a circle around it. And so as Reed and I were getting ready to take the king down, I realized, the furniture's here, and now he's going to New York. So I said, “So he doesn't have anything like this in New York,” to which the king's chief of protocol said to me, “No, no. He has another set. It was delivered in New York two days ago. This will now go back to Morocco.” I was like, “Oh, okay,” because I was trying to figure out, wow, how are they going to get it up there and beat the king to New York on his airplane.

We rode out, and the king was very pleased with his visit, and Reed tried to explain to the king, “But you have to come to the US more frequently. It's being here. It's being seen. It's making the personal contact with the President that is the real greasing agent that makes the relationship go.” The king, of course, had been so aloof. He's loath to travel, and he really didn't understand how he could know George Bush for so many years and still have to work the relationship. But as he said to him, you know, King Hussein is coming three times a year, even if some of them were called “private visits,” and seeing the President.

Mubarak — three times a year. The king once every few years wasn't going to cut it. And so it ended well, and it was just a wonderful experience to have. I felt fortunate and lucky enough to be an ambassador, but also to have a state visit on part of my watch was something that most don't get to have, so I'm pleased to go through it.

And then I would just say, Stu, just chronologically, so after the king's visit, I stayed in Maine for about three more weeks. I actually started doing some job hunting. My term was about up, and my successor, Freck [Frederick] Vreeland, who had replaced me as deputy assistant secretary of the Near East Bureau was going to replace me as ambassador, so I started job hunting. I went back, and Joan Plaisted was new on the ground; she'd been there less than two months when I returned, and she was ready to throw things back in my lap. She found me in a true transition mode, saying, “Joan, you decide; if it's not real important, don't bother with me. I'm going to really enjoy Morocco before I get out of here.” The one question mark was that Vreeland was having trouble getting confirmed. There was opposition to his confirmation, and we didn't know if it was going to get approved before Congress went out of session. If it didn't, it meant by the time he was confirmed early in 1992 — because we assumed it would happen, just it was a matter of removing some obstacles — I would have to be there until summer of '92. If they could get it done in the Congress, I would be leaving in a January time frame. I got the message on Thanksgiving Day, when I had 20-something people over to my house for Thanksgiving. I got the call from Freck Vreeland informing me that he had been confirmed almost at the midnight hour of the night before, which was the last night Congress was in session for that year. So we set the date of January 16 for my departure, and he asked me how long I wanted to be out there, and he wasn't going to rush, so we could work around that. But then I really got into an exiting mode and thoroughly enjoyed Christmas, my last weeks in Morocco, doing the normal farewells and going on a three-day 35-mile hike in the Atlas Mountains. So I should have returned my check to the government the last two months I was there, I was having such a good time.

A lot of the Moroccan history with the United States has always stemmed from the fact that the kings of Morocco had been great protectors of the small Jewish community in Morocco. At one time there were more than 600,000 Jews in Morocco. After quite a few exoduses they now are down to only about 10,000 Moroccan Jews. Hundreds of thousands went to live in Israel after the creation of Israel, and that was the origin of these families. And over a period now of 30-something years, that fact, and the king's been a moderate Arab. That is why he's been very valuable to the Mideast Peace Process. But by the time I arrived there, when there was heated Labor versus Likud politics in Israel, the king imagined, quite wrongly, that he could be some great influence on the Moroccan Jews of Israel. Most of them, a large number, had become members of the Likud Party; about 80 percent of the Moroccan Jews became Likud members. And he always felt that was a big stick he could carry in the Peace Process. The truth is that the king was removing himself so much from the hard work and the travel necessary to make international diplomacy work. He was trying to ride on a good reputation and as one of the first, most forward-leaning Arab leaders — most forward-leaning to Israel — and as head of the Al-Quds Committee in the Muslim world. He had the rank, he had the privilege, but he still didn't accept how much you have to get out there and renew that every day. It's the basis, it's the platform, for doing great things, but great things don't just come straight from great ideas. He was always, and I've found him to be, a visionary thinker on the Mideast and other international politics. He was a grand statesman. But the role he played in the 1970's had long become history as he aged and stayed a little bit more reclusive.

Q: Were you ever in a position of being instructed to try to get him to recognize Israel?

USSERY: No, I was instructed a few times to try. . . . There was the Dome of the Rock. There was this major altercation at the Dome of the Rock. There were calls for condemnation of Israel. There were times we tried to get the king to be forbearing or at least help behind the scenes. At that time it was a mix. Sometimes he would, sometimes he was sympathetic, sometimes the answer was “no way,” because if the king missed

opportunities to really engage — because it required risk to engage — we were guilty over time of abusing his position. We continued to see the king solely through the prism of this forward-leaning, reasonable moderate Arab who might some day establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Rather than solicit his advice, solicit his real engagement, we never did anything much more creative than mindlessly asking him to go out on a limb and "do one for the Gipper" and yell for Israel — almost to the point of insensitivity about the politics and dynamics of the Arab World. So after years of finding that all Washington could do was ask him to go and praise Israel, I think the king was getting kind of tired of it.

Q: What about when you left there in '92, whither Morocco, whither the king? What was your impression?

USSERY: Ah, good question. In '92, I left with the belief that Morocco was a developing country that could make it. I don't know how to define "make it," but that it could make it into the developed world, even in my lifetime, if it had the right kind of policies and programs in place or going into place. It was moving in a good direction. It had a very sound economy. It had, and still has, a terribly high percentage of illiterate citizens, particularly women in the rural areas. It needs to be able to make change in the educational area and educate its population for the 21st century. But I left with a great level of confidence. Even though I realized that the monarchy could be in its waning days over the next 10 to 20 years, the path seemed clear: first that the king's death would not destabilize the country; that the country could absorb the shock of losing Hassan after 30-something years quite well, make a smooth transition to the crown prince, who in turn was determined to see Morocco become more democratic. And many have described it as the Spanish model, under king Juan Carlos. I'm not convinced that the monarch would give up that much power that rapidly, but the fact that the Palace, even to this day, has continued to become less important in the daily lives of Morocco, and now, as we speak, the opposition parties, which I came to detest because of their position on the Iraq War and stirring up the population with totally reprehensible stories in the press, are now in power. They are acting responsibly. They haven't done as well as they hoped or the

voters thought they would, but they also don't have any experience in governing. But I think what's important is the fact that was in the opposition's and the king's mind that while they were loyal to the monarchy the king has refused to let them at the levers of power for years and years and years now, and the fact that he's done that — these are all great signs. Great progress on human rights, something we worked on. Moroccans are so close to Europe, and once were politically so close to the United States, and it's a country that understood that you can't have a duality of progress on one hand coupled with serious human rights abuses on the other and be welcomed by the Western Nations.

So I left with a high sense of confidence, one that in seven years has not been greatly disturbed. The longer the king lives, maybe the slower the transition will be because the longer he lives, it seems to be, he's a little bit more removed from the public and understanding their thinking, and change can't accelerate as much as it probably can under the crown prince. But I think Morocco's doing well, and indeed, if I live a long life, it's a country that I'll see make immeasurable progress. And every five years or more, I look forward to continue going back there.

Q: I may have asked this question before. I can't remember. Did Morocco suffer at all — I'm showing my prejudice — from sort of the social democratic disease that affects Europeans: you know, over-regulation and the general idea of control over all economic things at the government level rather than letting capitalism raise its ugly but effective head?

USSERY: Good. Well, now I think you've given me the essay question for the day. As a student of Morocco — and that's all I claim to be; it's so multidimensional and there are so many levels in Morocco, I'm not sure I can live long enough to become an expert. But as a student of Morocco — I first of all say Morocco came away less scarred from the colonial period than most of the African countries. This was certainly in sharp contrast to the Algerians, who were psychologically scarred, and to great lasting effect, by a horrendous war and, I believe, more than a million or more than two million casualties, with

France. A very noticeable difference with what happened with Morocco as a protectorate as opposed to a full colony of France. But Morocco at independence had about eight million people, I believe. Today it's about 30 million. The population has grown very fast. Population growth has been an issue, though not as much as in Algeria, where it's just burgeoning at lightning speeds. The history of the king has been really fascinating. One should remember that he had an instrumental role as a crown prince in securing freedom for Morocco and helping his father come back from exile in Madagascar. He was a tough crown prince and was said to have ordered the execution of some French settlers during the conflict. He made a lot of missteps at the beginning, and by 1970-71, there were two famous assassination attempts on his life: one, where 96 people, including the Belgian ambassador and others, were killed at a state dinner at the palace at the beach, when troops from his army attacked and began firing. It was an assassination attempt or a coup d'#tat. What's not clear, as I understand it, is that some of the troops who attacked may have been loyal to Hassan and were told that people were trying to kill the king, and they went in and started opening fire wildly. The king was hiding in a back room. He was discovered by a young officer who was under clear instructions that this was all about the removal of the king, pulled his rifle up to the king and prepared to fire. To which the king is supposed to have said, “You will not shoot me. I am your king. I am the commander of the faithful. Put down your rifle.” The soldier did, and a few minutes later, troops loyal to the king came and rescued him.

Within a period of a year, the King was flying back with his pilot, flying back on his Boeing aircraft, when he was attacked by his own air force coming back into Moroccan airspace from Europe. After a few passes the plane was just riddled with bullets, and the king got on the speaker and said something to the effect of “Stop firing, stop firing. The bastard is dead. Let me land. You've killed the king.” They let the king land, and then he had everybody rounded up and arrested who was staging the coup. To this day the Royal Air Maroc airline consists of Boeing airplanes because of how impressed the king was that the Boeing aircraft held up and continued flying under such damage. But it also gave the king,

a pilot at the time, a great fear of flying, and has led, almost 30 years later, to why the king doesn't travel very extensively.

But in the '70's the Moroccans became hugely indebted. In fact, one of the problems facing Morocco today is more than $20 billion in debt, one of the most heavily indebted per capita countries in the world. But they have been working on this problem very seriously and not incurring more debt over the last ten years. The king once said to me, “I've always been pleased that Morocco never had oil, because look what it did to Algeria. It's the curse of oil. Algeria went crazy on social spending. They spent more money than they could. They created all these programs and now they have nothing except more gas in the ground and they can't pay their bills.” But yes, Morocco had, in the '70's, gone on quite a social spending spree. I can't make the case about why they shouldn't have. I'm sure there are many good programs. They led to growth in the economy, development of agriculture that wouldn't have happened without that kind of spending. I don't know what Morocco would have been without it, but I do know that the legacy of that has been a serious debt problem, and cramps the budget.

Q: Well, you left. Just briefly, what did you do once you left?

USSERY: Well, I knew it wasn't going to get any better than this, as they say. I knew there wasn't going to be a job at a desk back in the State Department that would be satisfying enough. I also knew that if there was ever a time when I was going to make the move to the private sector, which I thought I wanted to do, that was going to be the time. I job-hunted around the country. I talked to Boeing in Seattle, Pepsi in New York, The Gap in San Francisco, Disney in Florida. I went to Atlanta and looked at Raytheon up in the Boston area. But it was also a time of a recession in the United States, a recession which would take George Bush from 91 percent popularity in the polls, the highest any modern President's ever known, right after the Gulf War, to defeat in 1992 by Bill Clinton. So most of the places I was talking to were laying off. And right after I was talking to Boeing, for

example, one day they announced they were laying 8,000 workers, and all I could think of was thank God I hadn't gone out to Seattle — I'd be right out on the street.

I took a job with a big political consulting firm called Black, Manafort, Stone and Kelly, owned by Burson-Marsteller in public relations, which was owned by Young-Rubicam Advertising. And I went to work with them for a year. Over the past six years I've largely focused on international business development and trying to help American companies overseas more. I also created a small management training company, a real interest of mine. Tom Ratchford, the deputy national science advisor, wrote a training program on innovation at the request of the Philip Morris Company. But in the end, I just closed down that little small corporation, couldn't find enough business opportunity out there to compete against the huge giant training companies in training, and just continued to focus on the international side. Four years ago I helped create the Morocco-US Business Council, which was one of the announcements made during King Hassan's 1995 state visit under President Clinton. The past two and a half years, I've spent more time in Romania than I've spent in the United States working on privatizations over there. I've worked with ex-ambassador Rick Burt, who was ambassador to Germany and assistant secretary for Europe and his partner, Haley Barbour, who was chairman of the Republican National Committee, putting together an investment fund, which we just opened in December of 1998, so two months ago. It starts with $30 million, including money with ADM and the International Finance Corporation, for the purpose of buying controlling interest in Romanian companies and trying to turn them around and try to make a good profit out of it. I continue to be involved in Romania through the fund, but now that it's actually set up and running and we have American staff and some Romanian staff over there, I'm now starting to try to figure out what the next grainy picture in my life will be. I've continued over the past seven years to be active in Republican politics. As we speak, one of the questions of the day is will George Bush, Jr., run for President? I like him. I hope he does. He visited me in Morocco. But more importantly, my office was next door to his in his father's 1988 Presidential campaign. This was a reason we discussed for the second time

I resigned from the State Department, to go to work in his father's campaign. I've never known a President personally. I guess that's part of my bias why I'd like to see this one. But I also believe that folks up close think him tremendously capable and he enjoys 70 percent popularity as governor of Texas today, where he was just reelected. So if he runs, I'll go. We also know Mrs. Dole, who's today talking about running, and I've met Senator McCain, and I've met Steve Forbes, who I don't think has a chance but is maybe running again. Of course, Forbes, I know him from Morocco. I've met Vice-President Quayle three times, I believe, but don't know him well. So for these reasons, I'll take a great interest in the upcoming election and we'll see where it all goes from there. But the future is definitely untold and unknown to me. I hope it will be adventurous.

Q: That was great.

End of Interview